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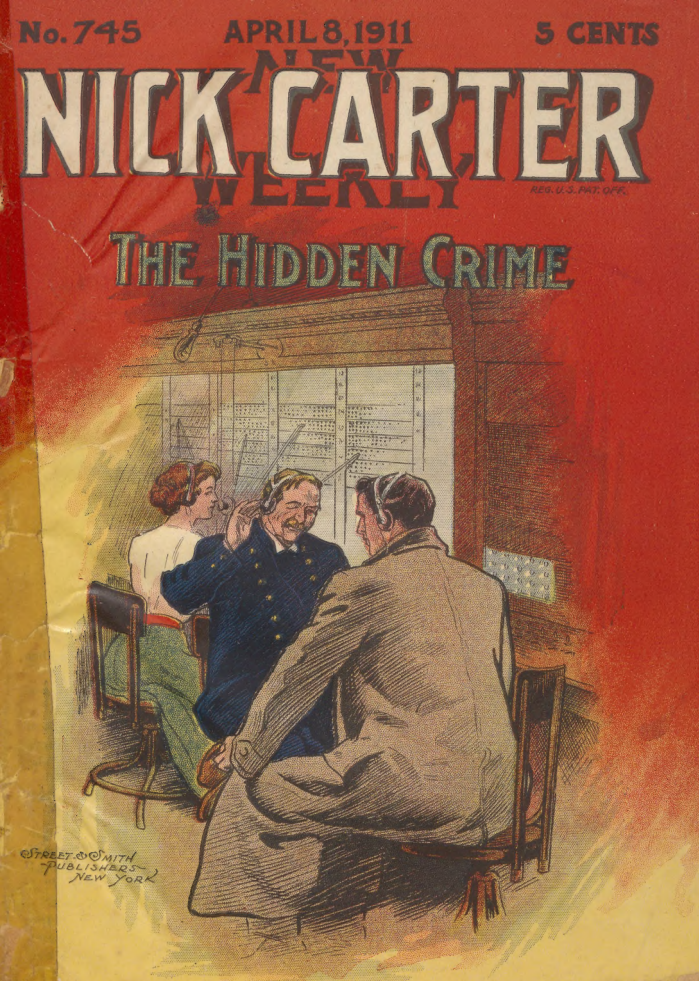
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

THE HIDDEN CRIME



At the sound of the voice for which they were listening over the wire, the chief winked knowingly at Nick Carter.

NICK CARTER

THE HIDDEN CRIME

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REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

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THE HIDDEN CRIME;

OR,

Nick Carter's Telephone Clew.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF LEILA.

"Is this Mr. Carter?" asked the voice at the other end of the telephone.

"Yes," replied the detective. "What is it? What is wanted?"

"I am the operator at the exchange, Mr. Carter. It is a long-distance call for you from Boston. Mrs. Patrick Garvan, the wife of your assistant, wishes to talk with you."

"All right. Put her on the wire—hello, Adelina? That you?"

"Yes, indeed," replied the voice of Adelina. "Oh, dear, I am so excited and worked up over what has happened, that I scarcely know where to begin; but Leila has disappeared."

"What? What's that you said?"

"Leila has disappeared. Leila Lancaster. This afternoon. Just as it was getting dark. Very mysteriously; the whole thing is wrapped up in mystery. It's too much for me. I do wish that Patsy had stayed here, as we wanted him to do. You must come at once; or send Patsy or Chick. Really, it is——"

"Say, Adelina?"

Well?"

"Suppose you give me some sort of a connected statement, and stop talking in generalities. You say that Leila Lancaster has disappeared. When and where and how?"

"This afternoon, about dark, I said. At Hite's department store, or somewhere near there. As to the how of it, I don't know. I haven't the least idea."

"Well, you can tell me what you do know about it, can't you?"

"Yes; I suppose so. We went to the store together—Leila and I. I was looking over some goods at one of the counters—we were selecting a cloth dress for her—when she left me for a moment, saying that she would return at once. I waited nearly half an hour for her, and she did not return. Then I left word with the girl behind the counter that I had gone to look for her—for Leila—and that I would return. I looked

all over the store and could not find her. I went back to the counter, and she had not returned to it; then I asked for the manager of the store, and he called his detectives and we instituted a general search for her. But nothing came of it. We could not find her. We could not find a trace of her after she left me at that counter to go to another part of the store. Nobody seems to have seen anything of her from that moment.

"I stayed around the store and had everybody there searching for her until it closed at six o'clock. Then I came home—to her home, you know—thinking that I might possibly find her here, or at least, a message from her; but there was nothing.

"Then I tried to remember everything I have heard her say to me since I have been here visiting her, and every name I have heard her mention; and one after another I telephoned to each one of them. Nothing came of it. It is nine o'clock now and it was soon after five when she disappeared. That is the whole story as far as I know it. Oh, I wish you were here, chief."

"Have you notified the police?" asked the detective.

"No. I thought it best to get you on the wire first. Shall I do so?"

"Wait a moment. Did Leila have any appointment at the store this afternoon?"

"Yes, I think so; in fact I know there was one, although she said next to nothing about it, and I don't know what it was, or with whom she made it."

"Was that why she left you when she did? To keep that appointment?"

"Yes. I think so. She did not say so."

"Has anything happened to her lately?"

"Not that I know about."

"Has she been in good health?"

"Splendid. Perfect."

"You haven't noticed that she was worrying, or that anything had happened to make her nervous, or anything like that?"

"No."

"My idea is that it may be another attack of aphasia—like that she had when she came here, to New York."*

"I had thought of that, too."

"I have been told," said the detective, "that persons who have such attacks once are apt to be subject to them again. I will telephone to Doctor Pardee, after I am through talking with you, and ask him about it. But I can't think that anything has happened to her that is of any moment."

"Nor I; and yet—it is very strange; all of it."

"If she has forgotten her name, and where she is, and all about herself, as she did that other time when we first came to know her, it is not so strange, Adelina."

"No; but I am worried, all the same."

"Naturally."

"I wish you would come here, chief, at once. Will you?"

"Certainly—if it seems necessary to do so; but I am not sure that it does. Probably Leila will be at home again all right before bedtime, Adelina."

"I don't know. I have tried to think so, but I cannot help the feeling that something has happened to her, and that no time should be lost."

"Well, if I do not hear from you again, by eleven o'clock, I will take the midnight train for Boston. That would get me there in the morning by seven."

"Say that you will come. I will feel easier then."

"I will start if I do not hear from you in the meantime. But you are to call me up at once if there is any news. I don't wish, just now, to make a useless trip to Boston."

They said good-by, then, and the conversation came to an end; but after a moment the detective took off the receiver again, and asked for Doctor Pardee's number.

"No," said the doctor, in reply to his question. "Because aphasia attacks a person once, it does not follow that that person is liable to another attack; that is, it does not particularly follow. Aphasia is brought about by a condition. It isn't a disease; it is the consequence, almost always, of some sort of mental strain. When one has recovered from it once, it is not likely to recur unless the same sort of a strain, or shock is encountered."

"I see. That is an idea. I will remember that," said the detective.

"If you should chop wood all day, not being accustomed to that form of exercise, Nick, certain muscles of your back and arms would become strained, and therefore lame."

"Certainly."

"Well, those same muscles would not become strained and lame again, unless you undertook some sort of exercise that told upon them in the same manner as chopping wood. That is what I mean."

"I understand."

*See preceding issue NICK CARTER WEEKLY, "The Seven Schemers."

"So, if Miss Lancaster has had another attack of aphasia, as you seem to suspect, it is a safe bet that she has encountered something of the same sort that threw her into that condition before."

"But there couldn't be another shock just like that one, you know."

"Why not?"

"Why? That time she was greatly worried about her brother, who had been murdered, as you remember; and she thinks she must have had some sort of a premonition of the fact. Now, she has not a relative in the world nearer than some distant cousins whom she has never seen."

"There are other people besides relatives, Nick."

"Oh, I know."

"There may be a sweetheart, somewhere."

"I have never heard one mentioned, or referred to in any way, doctor."

"That doesn't assure me that there was not one."

"Of course not."

"There is another thing, Nick, which I should call to your attention, perhaps."

"What is that?"

"When Miss Lancaster had that other attack, here in New York, and you met her on the avenue, near your own house, she was in a city that was strange to her; she was among unfamiliar surroundings, and there was nothing that she could encounter, or see, to remind her who she was. Everything was strange, and that only served to add to the bewilderment of forgetfulness. She is now in Boston, her old home, and the case is different."

"How different? What do you mean?"

"Why, there, the streets, and the scenes around her, are all more or less familiar. She was in a store, or near it at least, that was familiar to her, when this happened—if it did happen."

"What of that?"

"Only this: that the confusion of memory, under such circumstances, would be likely to disappear very soon. Almost at once; within a few minutes, or a few hours, at the most."

"I understand, I think."

"If Miss Lancaster had another attack of aphasia, it should have become dispelled by this time, unless, during the short time that it would have continued among familiar surroundings, she either wandered away to a place with which she was entirely unfamiliar—or was taken away."

"I see. I see. I see."

"That is the way I size it up, Nick."

"There is one thing, though, that you have forgotten."

"What is that?"

"She was away from Boston several years, traveling abroad. She did not return at all in all that time, until she arrived there only a day before the other attack came upon her, when she came from there to New York. Now, Boston is not so familiar to her as it would be if she had not been so long a time absent."

"On the contrary, I don't think that would make any difference. It is the place where she passed her childhood. It has always been her home. She would not forget it. No, I will stick to the opinion already expressed."

"You think, then, that something has happened to her which is not aphasia?"

"If you receive no information concerning her, I should incline to that opinion. I am not speaking as a detective; merely as a doctor."

"I know. That is exactly the sort of an opinion I wanted."

"I thought so; and Nick——"

"Well?"

"It seems to me that I would make some inquiries concerning that idea of mine about a sweetheart. As I remember Miss Lancaster, she was extremely beautiful, as well as very rich. Either one of those circumstances would attract sweethearts—and others, too."

CHAPTER II.

THE UNKNOWN QUANTITY.

"Well, Adelina? Any news yet?"

"Not a word. Nothing. I am almost beside myself with worry about her, chief," was the reply.

The detective had just arrived at the house in the Back Bay district of Boston, and Adelina met him at the door and conducted him at once to the library—a beautiful room in a beautiful home, where all the environment that wealth could bestow had been lavished to the utmost. In other words, the home of Leila Lancaster, heiress to more than two millions, and the very last of her line.

The time was shortly after eight o'clock in the morning following what has been told in the preceding chapter.

The detective laid aside his overcoat and seated himself before the glow of the coal fire that was burning in the open grate. He rubbed his hands together close to the warmth, for it was a bitterly cold morning in December, and then, tentatively, produced a cigar from one of his pockets.

"You may smoke here," said Adelina, with a half smile.

"I had some breakfast at the South Station," he said, by way of explanation; "but I did not care to take the time for a smoke, and I found that I could get here much more quickly than in a cab, where I could have smoked. Now tell me all about it, Adelina."

"I told you all that I know about it last night, when I talked with you over the long-distance telephone," was the reply.

"Let me see," said Nick. "It is now about fifteen hours since she disappeared, and you have heard nothing, or discovered nothing since then, that provides a reason for that disappearance. Is that correct?"

"Yes; and I have waited up all night, expecting Leila to return. Do get at it at once, chief. I was never so——"

"Never mind that. We must get at it in the right way. You have been here, Adelina, five days, this morning, visiting Leila, and you were to return home a day or two before Christmas, which will occur one week from Wednesday."

"I don't see what that has to do with it."

"Only the five days, my dear. But much can be said and done, and acted, and referred to by word or deed in five days, to afford us a clew to what has happened; if there is any clew; so I want you to try to remember everything that has occurred, since you came here."

"Oh, I have tried that. I have been all over it, time and time again, all through the long night that has just passed. I haven't slept a wink, of course."

"Of course not; nor had your clothes off, have you?"

"Certainly not."

"First, then: has Leila shown any signs of worry, since you have been here?"

"Not one that I could see."

"Has she ever mentioned that attack of aphasia that she had last summer?"

"Oh, yes. We have both laughed over it. It can be laughed at now, although it was very tragic at the time. Still, there are humorous things about it, too."

"Certainly. Did she express any fear that such an attack might come upon her again?"

"No, I don't think she has had such a thought."

"Has she said that she ever had such an attack before that one?"

"She said that she never did have one, and really had not heard that there was such a thing as aphasia."

"Adelina, has Leila got a sweetheart? Is she in love, do you know?"

"I don't know. If she has one, she has never taken me into her confidence; but I have suspected that she is in love."

"Oh, you have, eh? Why?"

"Intuition, I suppose. Women see—or sense, rather—such things."

"Have you seen the him?"

"No. I don't think she has, either, since she left the other side."

"Oh; then if she has a lover, he is somewhere in Europe?"

"I don't know. I am only guessing; but that is my idea."

"How did you get the idea?"

"Oh, dear, I wish you would tell me what all that has to do with Leila's disappearance, chief. I thought you would start out at once, to find her, and here you are, seated before the fire, smoking like a stuffed chimney, and looking as if nothing had happened at all."

"We have to creep before we walk, Adelina, and when I do start to do something, I will go all the faster by being informed of everything that may bear upon the case. And as to what my present questions have to do with the matter—that remains to be seen. They may have nothing to do with it, and that is what I am trying to find out."

"Well, then, I got the idea that she was in love, and that the object of her affection is now abroad somewhere, by seeing her receive a letter that came to her the morning of the day after I arrived."

"Tell be about it."

"There isn't anything to tell, only this: I brought a New York paper to the house with me. She immediately seized upon it, and turned to the shipping news, and I saw that she was studying the list of steamers arrived. After a moment she remarked casually—very casually indeed:

"'The *Utopia* arrived yesterday afternoon, I see. I am expecting a letter from abroad. I suppose it should get here to me to-day, don't you?'

"I said that I supposed it should, and that was all that was said about it. Well, the letter came that evening while we were at the dinner table. The butler

brought it in to her, and when he gave it to her, he said:

"'The letter from abroad, Miss Lancaster.' Mind you, he said *the* letter, showing that she had been expecting it earlier than by the *Utopia*, and that she had told him to bring it to her at once when it did come; otherwise, he would have left it outside till after we had finished with the dinner."

"Quite likely," said the detective, with a smile.

"Of course I expected her to excuse herself, and to read it at once. She did not. She put it down beside her plate, after blushing very prettily, I thought, and went on talking at random, as we had been doing before it came. Then, when we left the table, she took the letter with her, and after making some trivial excuse, which did not mention the letter, she went to her own rooms—to read it, of course. That is how I read the signs, if you must know all those stupid particulars."

"They are not stupid, at all; very far from it, in fact. I find them very interesting."

"Indeed?"

"Now, what was her demeanor when she came back to you after having read the letter?"

"Perfect, of course. Leila's demeanor always is perfect, chief."

"That is not at all what I mean, and you know it, Adelina."

"Well, she looked as if she had been greatly disturbed about something, and had stayed rather a long time in her room to hide the traces of it."

"Disturbed? Do you mean that she had been crying?"

"No."

"What do you mean?"

"I am not sure. I was trying to think. I should say that she had been made angry by the letter—or by something that had happened after she went to her room, and the letter was about the only thing that could have happened."

"Angry, eh? No tears?"

"If there had been tears, she had successfully hidden all traces of them."

"Just hot about something, eh?"

"I believe that is what you men call it, sometimes; yes."

"And she said nothing about it?"

"No."

"Has she made no mention of the letter, since then?"

"None."

"Well, what else has happened to attract your attention, whether it is connected with the receipt of that letter or not?"

"Nothing."

"How about that trip downtown, yesterday, when she disappeared?"

"Oh; that?"

"Yes, that. What took you to the stores?"

"The same things that always take women to the stores, who have money to spend: bargains."

"Christmas shopping?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Did you go after any particular thing?"

"No."

"Who suggested going at all? You?"

"No; Leila."

"You mentioned over the telephone that there was an engagement of some sort, downtown, and that when Leila left you, supposedly for a moment or two only, it was your idea that she was going away, and leaving you there at the counter to wait for her, in order that she might keep that engagement. Now, just why did you say that, Adelina?"

"Because I thought it; and it was not really an engagement, perhaps."

"Undoubtedly; but why did you think it? Did she say so, in so many words?"

"No. She had said, when we were on the way downtown, that she half expected to meet an acquaintance at one of the stores, although she was not sure."

"Well, what else?"

"Nothing else."

"Did she say anything about introducing you to her acquaintance, if they did meet?"

"No."

"Did you connect the occasion with the letter at all?"

"I couldn't help doing that, chief."

"Why?"

"I don't know. I just got the idea, that is all; because I believe that the letter had made her angry, I suppose. Anyhow, that is as good a reason as another."

"Don't you think that she left you at that counter purposely, so that she would not be expected to present you to the friend or acquaintance she was to meet? Or, still better, because she preferred that you should not see that acquaintance at all?"

"Yes, that is precisely the idea that I had about it."

"Now, did you get another idea, too?"

"What sort of a one?"

"Did it occur to you to hazard a guess as to why she did not care to have you see her acquaintance?"

"Yes."

"What sort of a guess did you make about it?"

"I have already told you that I associated the two things together. Well, I imagined that it was the man himself, who had written that letter, whom she half expected to encounter at the store, and that she intended to surprise him, and that she did not care to have *anybody* see her at all, when she did that. I don't think the man expected to see her at all, although I think she went there purposely, because she expected to see him."

CHAPTER III.

A VERY SMALL CLEW.

"I had a talk with Doctor Pardee, over the telephone, right after I talked with you," the detective explained. "We discussed the old case that affected Leila, six months ago, when she was stricken with aphasia in the streets of New York—or rather, on the Pullman car, just before the train arrived in New York."

"Yes."

"He gave it as an expert opinion that Leila was—is now—no more liable to an attack of aphasia, than she ever was; that she is not supposed to have it again, because she had it once, you understand?"

"Yes."

"But he also said that if some shock of the same nature that affected her the other time, has come to her again, it might have that effect upon her, because it would quite naturally affect the same brain cells."

"And was it the doctor who suggested the idea of a lover to you, chief?"

"Yes."

"When Leila had that other attack, her brother had been murdered," said Adelina.

"Yes. But she did not know that. She only feared that she had lost him, somehow. She had been thinking and worrying about him for a long time, and when she arrived in the city of her home, from abroad, and found that the address to which she had been sending her letters for him was nothing but a gin mill, it shocked her. Then she was sent to an obscure address in Ninth Avenue in New York—and she was directed there in a manner that worried her more than ever, and which, therefore, added to the shock already induced."

"I understand you now, chief."

"So that is where the idea advanced by the doctor, of a lover, or a possible fiancé, enters into the case. I have regarded Leila as rather an intense young woman, Adelina."

"There is no sort of doubt of that."

"If, over on the other side of the ocean, she gave her heart to some young man—and all her love and devotion; if after she returned here she had reason to doubt him; if that letter you have referred to, contained some message which clinched that doubt, or which rendered her doubts a certainty; if she only suspected that the young man was in this country, and went to the store when she did so, more to satisfy herself that he was not here and that she had been wrong—but found him there, nevertheless, and so became convinced that she had good reason to doubt—there was the shock."

Adelina nodded her head with emphasis.

"I outline these ideas," said the detective, "because I want you thoroughly to comprehend them."

"Yes."

"And because I want you, now, to do the first detective work that you have undertaken since that time when you met Patsy and fell in love with him in your own country, in South America."

"You want me to help you?"

"Yes."

"In what way? What am I to do?"

"We shall both visit that store where Leila disappeared, presently; but when we get to it, I want you to proceed on your own initiative, without regard to me, or to what I may, or may not do."

"Just follow my own ideas, you mean?"

"Yes; as if I had nothing to do with it."

"Why?"

"My reasons for that request are twofold. One is that your natural intuitions will aid you very greatly in the matter, because of your affection for Leila, which I know to be a deep and lasting one."

"It certainly is, chief."

"The other is that if you work alone, unhampered by me, or by my advice and suggestions, the little things that have come to your understanding in your relations with Leila, will recur to you, and you will use them; whereas, if you depended upon me, they would be utterly forgotten. That is all, for the present."

"But, in what way are we to consider this supposed man, of whose existence we are not even positive, chief?"

"That, my dear, is precisely what I do not want to

suggest to you. That is the exact reason why I am directing you to go it alone. You must form your own conclusions."

"Oh."

"They will not be the same as mine. They may be better, or they may not be as good; we don't know that, and we won't know it till we have tried them out. We cannot try them both out, if we work together, but if we work separately, both must be tried out. Now, if you will get on your things, we will go downtown."

"Why go together at all? Why not leave me right here, to start out in my own way?" she asked.

"Because I want you to start me right. I want you to take me to that counter where you were standing when Leila parted with you. You can leave me there."

"Shall you notify the police of the matter?"

"I suspect that they know it already, from the store detectives whom you interested in the case yesterday."

"That is so. I had not thought of that. One more thing, though, chief."

"Well?"

"Am I to let you know at once, and constantly, of the progress I make, if I make any?"

"No. You are to do as I have said; work on the case precisely as if I did not exist."

"Oh; I see. We will be rivals, then?" she asked, smiling.

"Call it that, if you like."

"I wish you had brought Patsy here with you."

"He is busy on another affair, just now."

"And Chick?"

"The same."

Adelina shrugged her shoulders and started to leave the room.

"Your whole object," said the detective, when she paused for an instant at the door, "is to find your friend Leila. You are to forget that you are acting as a detective in the case, and must remember only that your friend has disappeared. In other words, I want you to work with your heart."

"And brain, of course?"

"My dear Adelina, the mental heart is in the brain; it is only the physical heart, which is nothing but a power pump, that is locked up inside the torso. Now, get ready."

While she was out of the room, Nick used the telephone to call a conveyance, and they were soon running downtown inside a hack automobile—and there was no conversation between them during the trip.

At the store, still in silence, Adelina conducted the detective to the counter where she had been standing when Leila parted with her—and the young woman behind the counter at once recognized her and, leaning forward, inquired:

"Have you heard any news of Miss Lancaster, madam?"

"None at all," replied Adelina. "Have you?"

"No; only——"

"Well?"

"I have a friend who works at the umbrella counter who knows Miss Lancaster by sight. She thinks she saw her yesterday afternoon, but is not sure whether it was before you and she were separated."

"I see. I will ask her about it. What is your friend's name, please?"

"Miss Saxton. Her first name is Lina."

"Thank you. I will go there at once."

"Wait," said the detective, when they had drawn back from the counter.

"Well?" replied Adelina.

"Now that you are directly on the spot where you parted with Leila, the scene must recur to you all the more vividly, doesn't it?"

"Yes."

"Tell me just where you were standing together, how it happened that she left you, and exactly what she said, word for word, when she did leave you; also, what you noticed her to be doing, or what you thought she was doing, just before she left you."

"We were standing there," replied Adelina, pointing. "We were both looking over some goods that this Miss Pennoyer was showing us, and——"

"Wait again. Was Leila paying close attention to the goods that were being shown?"

"To tell the truth, I thought not. It occurred to me that she had lost her interest in the dress she wanted to purchase. She stood a little back from the counter, part of the time, and I had to call her attention once or twice to what was being shown."

"Exactly. Then she was already looking for some one whom she half expected to see. That is what I wanted to find out."

"Yes, I think she was. She kept looking around the store."

"What happened then?"

"She came up closer to me and said:"

"'Adelina, I think I will leave you here for a moment or two. I won't be long. You may go ahead with the selection, and I will be pleased with whatever

you decide upon. You know I brought you here to get the benefit of your taste; not to use my own."

"I said, 'yes,' and she repeated again that she would not be long; and then she went away."

"That is all?"

"That is all."

"I will go with you to see Miss Saxton. We will part there, however."

In another moment they were at the umbrella counter, and had found Miss Saxton.

"Miss Pennoyer sent me to you," said Adelina, addressing the young woman, while Nick remained near at hand, listening. "She tells me that you think you saw Miss Lancaster yesterday afternoon."

"I am sure that I did," was the reply.

"Thank you. Now, I want you to tell me if you think I was with her at the time you saw her, or was she alone?"

"No, you were not with her, nor was she alone. She was talking with a gentleman—or, at least, I think she was talking with him. They stood looking at each other, and I suppose they were talking together. They were facing each other."

"Could you tell me what time that was?"

"No; only that it was within an hour or less of our closing time."

"Was the gentleman known to you, by name, or by sight, Miss Saxton?"

"No. I have seen him before, somewhere, I am sure, but not for a long time, and I cannot recall when and where it was, although I have tried to do so."

"You are quite positive about your recognition of Miss Lancaster?"

"Quite. Yes, mam."

"Can you tell me if she went away from this part of the store with the gentleman, or without him?"

"She went away alone—toward the main doorway. He went on toward the middle of the store," was the reply.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SECOND CLEW.

Adelina nodded to the detective and left the spot. Nick pushed himself forward and spoke to Miss Saxton.

"I am also interested in the matter of the disappearance of Miss Lancaster," he said. "I was with Mrs. Garman when she questioned you, just now, and I would like to ask you two or three more questions, if you will reply to them."

"Certainly, sir, with pleasure."

"About that young man—I suppose the gentleman was a young man, wasn't he?"

"No, sir; not what I would call a young man, as that expression is generally used. He was a man considerably past thirty, at all events, I should say. He bought an umbrella of Miss Larkin. She can tell you more about him than I, I think."

"But his appearance suggested to you that you had seen the man before?" Nick asked.

"Yes."

"In this store, do you think?"

"I think so. I am not sure, sir."

"At this counter?"

"I have always worked at this counter, ever since I have been here."

"How long a time is that?"

"Nearly a year."

"And will you tell me where you worked before that time?"

"At Gordon and Marcys' store."

"At what counter there?"

"The same."

"Might you not have seen him when you were working there?"

"I think that is very likely; more likely, in fact, than that it was since I have been here, for I know that it is a very long time since I have seen the face before; so long that I have forgotten when it was, and I have a good memory for faces, as a rule."

"What I particularly wish to know is if you are sure you have not seen that man within the last six months, say."

"Oh, I am positive that it was longer ago than that, since I saw him before—even if I am not mistaken about it, altogether. He may only have resembled some one else that I had seen here, or at the store of Gordon and Marcy."

"That is quite true. Now will you describe his appearance to me? And then I won't bother you any more."

"He was quite handsome, else I should not have noticed him at all."

"Yes?"

"He was wearing a fur coat, thrown open, because it is warm inside the store. It had a seal collar and facing, mink lining, and the shell was black broadcloth. He wore a silk hat, dark clothing, and a fancy

vest of figured brown; a blue tie with a diamond horse-shoe for a stick pin; a double watch chain, with a locket pendant from the center of it; and black shoes."

"Thank you. Now, as to his face—and hands, if you noticed them?"

"He wore a close-fitting, tan, kid glove, on his left hand, with the other glove drawn between the thumb and forefinger of the hand, and he kept the thumb of that hand through the upper frog on his coat, all the time I noticed him. The right hand was bare, of course, and—that is all I remember about that."

"His face?"

"He was handsome. He had a very well-shaped mustache, not too heavy, and quite black. It curled a little at the ends, naturally, I thought. He had good teeth, a pleasant smile, his complexion was fair, I should say; his hair was dark, though not so dark as his mustache, and it was tinged with gray, over the temples. He was considerably taller than you are; just a little above the medium height, I should say."

"Thank you. Now, will you point out Miss Larkin to me?"

"That is Miss Larkin at the end of the counter."

"Thank you again. Now, just one favor, if I may ask it, Miss Saxton."

"Well, sir?"

"If you should see that gentleman again, will you do me the favor to try to find out who he is?"

"I don't know how I could do that, sir?"

"You have only to call one of your store detectives to you, and to indicate my wish to him, or to her, as the case may be. I will see the manager of the store, and will have them instructed about the matter."

"Yes, I will do that, of course."

"But you are not to let the gentleman suppose that we are interested in him. You understand that?"

"Perfectly."

"Again I thank you. This is my card, if you care to know how to address me when we meet the next time." He bowed and passed along to the end of the counter.

"Miss Larkin, I believe?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Yesterday afternoon, about five—a little before, or a little later than that—you sold an umbrella to a gentleman whom Miss Saxton has just described to me. Do you know to what occasion and transaction I refer, Miss Larkin?"

"Yes. Miss Saxton and I have talked it over. You are here about the disappearance of Miss Lancaster, are you not?"

"Yes. Do you remember the man, and the fact that you sold an umbrella to him?"

"Perfectly well."

"Have you ever seen the man before, that you remember?"

"No, sir."

"Do you know Miss Lancaster by sight?"

"I would know her now, if I should see her—since I have talked about her to Miss Saxton."

"Ah, then you remember to have seen her talking with the man to whom you sold the umbrella?"

"No; but I saw her standing here, near this end of the counter, for some minutes, before I sold that umbrella. She was not looking at the umbrellas, or at anything here, for sale, but kept her face turned toward the door, as if she was expecting some one. That is what I thought. People often meet here, because it is near the door."

"I see. She was here, then, when the man bought the umbrella?"

"No. She moved away, just as he approached the counter. I saw her go toward the jewelry department—and then I did not see her again until a little later, when she and the gentleman who had just purchased the umbrella, met face to face, right there, just back of where you are standing now, sir."

"You saw them meet and address each other?"

"I saw them meet. If they addressed each other, I neither saw nor heard it, sir."

"What did you see and hear?"

"I did not hear anything. I saw them meet, face to face, and stop. The man's back was toward me, but I could see her face. My impression at the time, was—well, it was not a pleasant one. I see such things too often in this store."

"What was that impression?"

"Why, I thought that the man had spoken to her, pretending that he knew her, and that she resented it—in utter silence; just by giving him a look that ought to have squelched an ordinary man. I was busy with another customer, but I looked up at them from time to time, because the scene interested me."

"Why did it interest you?"

"Because I was surprised that she did not turn away at once, after she had made him feel small for speaking to her."

"They must have stood there facing each other for some time, then?"

"Several minutes, I should say."

"And you don't think she spoke to him during all that time?"

"I don't think she did. If she did so, I was not aware of it. He did all the talking."

"Then he did speak to her?"

"Yes; and she seemed to listen; but all the time the expression of her face was one of the utmost contempt and dislike. At least, that is the way I read it."

"Tell me just what happened when they parted."

"I did not see them when they parted, if they did part. They may have gone away together, for all I know. Another customer claimed my attention, and when I looked up again both had disappeared."

"You would recognize that man, if you should see him again?"

"Certainly. He was very handsome."

"If you should see him in the store again, will you call Miss Saxton's attention to him, please?"

"Certainly, if you wish it."

"And if you should encounter him elsewhere, will you telephone the fact, and the circumstance, to Mrs. Garvan, or to me, at this address?" He took out another of his cards, and wrote upon it the address of Leila's home. "And will you ask Miss Saxton to do the same?"

"With pleasure, sir."

"Now, will you try to describe the umbrella you sold to the man?"

"Oh! the umbrella. I can do that. I can do better than that, even."

"How so?"

"It was a special design, of which we had only two handles made—for two brothers who wanted them just alike, and at the same time different from any others. I refer to the handles, of course."

"Of course."

"One of the brothers died very suddenly, and the other one came here and made arrangements with the manager not to take the umbrellas. They were rather high-priced. I have not sold the second one. I will show it to you, if you would like to see it."

"I will do better than that; I will buy it," said Nick.

"The price is twenty-five dollars," said Miss Larkin hesitatingly, as if she thought he might back out of the purchase when he heard the price.

"I will take it, just the same, if you will get it for me," said the detective.

"That is it," she remarked presently, after she had brought the umbrella from a drawer beneath the counter, and had removed the chamois covering from the gold handle, which had been chased and engraved in a beautiful design.

"This one bears a monogram," said Nick, examining it. "It is strange, too, for it is my own. The letters are N and C."

"Yes, sir. I am very glad that they happen to be the letters of your name. You will be glad to have that umbrella in that case."

"Surely. Was there a monogram also on the other one, that you sold to that man?"

"Yes, indeed. There were three letters in that one."

"What were they, please?"

"J, H, and C."

Nick Carter carried the umbrella away with him when he left the store.

CHAPTER V.

ADELINA SEEKS A CLEW.

Adelina went about her part of the work in an entirely different way. It was her idea to trace Leila, without giving much, if any, thought to unknown persons who might have been instrumental in spiriting her away. To tell the truth, Adelina had not much faith in the idea that other persons had been instrumental in the disappearance of Leila.

She believed that Leila had had another attack of that aphasia that had affected her once before; that it had come upon her during the few moments while they had been separated, the preceding day, and that her friend had wandered away while in that condition.

Adelina, therefore, did in this case much the same thing that Nick Carter had done in that other one which preceded it, to which reference has been made.

She consulted a physician.

As soon as she parted with Nick Carter, she left the store. Outside, she summoned a conveyance, and had herself driven to the Ames Building where she knew there was a firm of reputable lawyers concerning whom she had heard Patsy, her husband, speak well on two or three different occasions.

Arrived there she asked for Mr. Condon, of the firm, and was at once admitted to his private office.

"Mr. Condon," she said, "I do not want to consult you upon a legal matter at all. I do wish some personal advice, though, and I have heard my husband speak of you several times, so I felt at liberty to call upon you."

"I remember your husband very well indeed, and very pleasantly, Mrs. Garvan," he replied, "and I need not say that I shall be happy to be of service to you. What can I do?"

"I wish to consult a physician—not for myself, but upon a point concerning which I wish to be instructed. I think the subject would come under the head of nervous disorders, but I am not certain as to that. In a word, the subject is aphasia. Can you refer me to such a physician? to one who will know what he is talking about, and who will get directly at the subject, without indulging in generalities?"

"I think so," was the smiling reply. "I have just such a man as that for one of my personal clients. Wait a moment, and I will speak to him."

He seized the telephone and called for a number; afterward he talked for some moments over the phone, and when he put it aside he said:

"You heard nearly all that was said, of course. If you will remain here with me about twenty minutes, Mrs. Garvan, and chat with me, Doctor Jeroleman will be here by that time. We had an engagement together, and I have asked him to come here a little sooner; that is all."

"I shall be very glad to wait here," Adelina replied, "for by seeing the doctor here, I will have the benefit of your opinion, too—and perhaps you can make suggestions that will help me."

"I only hope that I can," he replied.

Twenty minutes later:

"Doctor Jeroleman," said Adelina, after introductions had taken place, and the purport of her visit had been explained, "I want some general advice upon the subject of aphasia—and I need not say that I expect to pay for it exactly, as if I were at your office, and were consulting you for my own personal benefit. Please do not object to that, for I shall feel very much better to have it so."

"Very well," said the doctor. "What is it that you wish to know? I am not sure that I can tell you, but I will try."

"I have a friend whom I have been visiting during the last five days. Six months ago she returned from Europe, taking a ship directly to Boston. She and a brother were all that were left of the family, and she was anxious to find him at once. She went to an address to which she had been in the habit of sending her letters to him—he had not been living at their home for some time—and was directed to an address in New York. She was greatly worried about him. She started for New York, but while on the Pullman car, just before she arrived there, she was stricken with aphasia, and forgot who she was, where she was going, or in what part of the world she happened to be at that time. She was encountered, wandering along an avenue in New York, by a very dear friend of mine, and was brought to our home—where she speedily recovered. Now she has disappeared, here in Boston. I want to find her. That is the case. That is why——"

"One moment, please."

"Yes?"

"Are you, by any chance, referring to Miss Lancaster?"

"Indeed I am. Why? Do you know her?"

"She has consulted me, only recently, on this same subject. She wanted to know whether such an attack as she had in New York was likely to occur again."

"Isn't that strange—that I should have come directly to you? So you are entirely familiar with her case, doctor?"

"Yes. I went very deeply into the subject with her."

"Then I need not give you more of the particulars about the previous history of her case?"

"No; but the present history—yes. For instance, I had no idea that she had disappeared. I would like to hear just how that happened, if you please."

Adelina told him carefully all that was already known about it.

He listened to the end in utter silence, with his head bowed and his brows contracted; and at the close of her account of the affair, he said:

"I entirely agree with what Doctor Pardee, in New York, has told Mr. Carter. Another attack of aphasia was likely to occur, under the same conditions; but not likely to, under entirely different ones. And—I want to say it now—I quite agree with you, Mrs. Garvan, in your theory of the affair. I believe that Miss Lancaster has had another attack of aphasia. I do not believe that the attack would continue very long unless she was in the meantime removed from familiar surroundings.

"It is absurd to suppose that Leila was abducted from that store yesterday afternoon," said Adelina. "When she went away from it, she had either forgotten who she was and where she was going—or she went of her own accord; and that I do not and will not believe. She would not be so discourteous to me, for one thing."

"I quite agree with you. But there is another thing, Mrs. Garvan, to be considered."

"What is that, doctor?"

"Victims of aphasia are also good hypnotic subjects," said the doctor tersely.

"Ah," exclaimed Adelina. "There may be something in that."

"There may be; but I doubt it in this case."

"Why?"

"I incline to the theory of aphasia; to a sudden attack of it, brought on by approximately the same conditions that existed in the preceding case."

Adelina then explained all that she knew about the supposition that there had been a man in this case, whom Leila had encountered at the store; but, of course, she did not know all that had been told to Nick Carter about that meeting. At the close of what she had to say, the doctor remarked:

"Let us consider the other case first. Let us see just what it was that induced that other attack. She had been abroad some years, I believe, studying art. She had applied herself rather closely, had she not?"

"Yes."

"Her brother was a wild chap, who occasioned her a great deal of worry—more than she realized at the time, I suppose?"

"I thoroughly believe that, doctor."

"She told me that when she went to London, she had no intention of returning to Boston, at once, but meant to stay for some time in England; but that anxiety concerning her brother brought her here before she would otherwise have thought of coming—and when she arrived here she found that he had disappeared; that is, that she could not find him, and it amounted to the same thing so far as she was concerned."

"Yes."

"Now, let us remember that she had been overworking in the first place; secondly, that she had traveled from Italy to London, expecting to rest there and amuse herself; that arriving in London, she suddenly determined to come home at once."

"For the third count, doctor," said Adelina, interrupting him, "she had, up to that time, been constantly called upon by her brother, to supply him with more money than his income. When she arrived in London, she found that he had sent her one thousand dollars in cash, by express. The fact that he had sent her money at all was enough to startle her, but that he should have sent it in that manner was also surprising."

"I did not know that; but it only strengthens the theory I was getting at."

"Well, sir?"

"All these things, while she was on the ship on her way home, worried and harrassed her. She arrived in Boston to be still more worried and harrassed. Instead of having had rest, after her overwork, she had just the opposite: worry and anxiety."

"Yes."

"She arrived in Boston about noon of one day; she left Boston for New York the morning of the following day, after a sleepless night of worry. On that train she lost her memory."

"Yes, doctor."

"Now, for the fourth, and the last of these counts, we will bear in mind that she was alone; that she had no one to whom she could confide her troubles; that her pride would have repelled such a confidence, had there been a friend near at hand. She bore it alone."

"Precisely."

"You see, Mrs. Garvan, the whole affair of that time, impelled a concentration of mind that was foreign to her manner of thinking, and which preyed upon her all the more, because she was alone in the world. She probably dropped asleep, or into a coma, while in the Pullman, and she forgot all about herself, literally."

"Yes."

"Now, let us see if we can work out a theory which will give us another cause for inducing the same condition of mind and thought that she was in when that other attack came upon her. That is what we must do. It is rather a metaphysical, than a psychological condition, that we must search for. In other words, the effect of it must be the same, while the primal cause of it will be utterly different. Only——"

"Well, sir?"

"There must be a man; there must be great affection, amounting to love; there must be the element of uncertainty about him, his location, and his character; there must be the fear of exposure, which would bring about discredit upon her, or upon him, in some way; there must be the element of disgust, repulsion, scorn, even, but it must be offset in a measure by an affection which she cannot overcome—and there must be, more than all, real heart pain; real mental suffering. Now, can you, knowing her as you do, and having been with her as you have been, imagine such a condition as existing?"

"It will be all made up out of the imagination; mostly, at least."

"But based upon something that is tangible, or you would not have the imagination to assist you. That is so, isn't it?"

"Yes. It refers to what I have already told you about the letter, that she expected to receive, which came; that seemed to anger her; and about the fact that she more than half expected to see some one at that store, who did not expect to see her there."

"Mrs. Garvan, if that man was there; if he was her lover, and if he had deceived her in some important thing, we would have about the same condition," said the doctor.

CHAPTER VI.

LOST—UTTERLY LOST.

"Shall I go ahead with my theory?" asked the doctor.

"Please do so," replied Adelina.

"You will understand that it is based entirely upon theory, Mrs. Garvan?" he insisted.

"Yes."

"I am only considering the mental aspect of the case, from an entirely abstract point of view. You understand that?"

"Perfectly. But I am deeply interested."

"Then we will consider that we are talking of a nameless young woman—not directly about Miss Lancaster."

"Very well."

"We will consider that you have come to me, and have made me understand this case as I do understand it, without mentioning a name, and without my having accepted any idea as to the identity of the patient. That is it, I am discussing a patient, just as a farmer would discuss the annual yield of crops."

"I understand."

"I discuss from a hypothesis that you have given me. I say, here is a young woman to whom such and such things have occurred in the past; who has been again afflicted—for we both agree as to that part of it, I believe?"

"Yes."

"I say to you, then, this: 'The patient has no near relative. She is an orphan, and she has lately lost her only brother. The blow came upon the patient the first time, through her affections, and therefore it must have fallen this time through her affections; there is no near relative to whom she could have given her affections—there is no person known to us, whose wrongdoing would have caused her pain, therefore she had a lover; therefore, somewhere, there was or is a man with whom she was, or is, in love. You get the idea?"

"Yes, doctor."

"If there was such a person, she must have known him and loved him, on the other side of the ocean. The expected letter establishes that much; the receipt of such a letter, indorses it. You think so?"

"Yes."

"The patient was at ease, at first, after her arrival in this country—or other things claimed her attention to the exclusion of that one. During the months—about six, I think—that she has been here at home, since the first attack, letters have come that have brought unrest with them—or, what is more likely, no letters have come at all, and the unrest and worry have been all the greater for that reason.

"Then the patient receives a letter, or a message of some sort, that we do not know about, that tells her that a letter is to be expected at a certain time—or soon. I believe you said that the butler at her home acted in your presence, as if he, too, in her interests, had been expecting such a letter, and watching for it?"

"Yes."

"The patient, then, has to endure a period of uncertain waiting—and that is the very worst thing that could have happened to her, and it is exactly what would have brought about the very same condition of mind that brought on the other attack."

"I understand."

"Then a letter arrives. The patient takes it to her room with her, in order that no one will be looking on when the seal is broken. She is gone a long time, and returns finally with evidences of passing anger, or some such emotion, about her."

"There is no doubt of that."

"A visit to the stores is suggested. The patient suggests to you, in words or in manner, or in both ways, that she half expects—not expects, exactly, but still supposes—that she will encounter some person she knows at the store; a person who is not expecting to see her there."

"I feel quite sure of that, doctor."

"Now a question."

"Yes?"

"Should you say that there was repressed excitement about the patient when she started out with you yesterday? The repressed excitement of expectancy?"

"Yes. I think so now, as I review it, doctor."

"Then we will say that it was the lover that she ex-

pected to see—and we will say that it was not the lover whom she did see."

"Why, doctor?"

"Because, if it had been the lover—the man whom she expected to see at the store, who met her there, all of the cerebral conditions necessary to have brought about the condition of aphasia, as it was induced the first time it happened, would have been dispelled, the instant the patient saw the man."

"And on the other hand, doctor?"

"If the man was not the lover, but yet was one who was known to both of them, or if he was one to whom the relations existing between the patient and the other man were known, the cerebral conditions I have referred to, would have been brought to a crisis of activity."

"I think I understand you, doctor."

"We will assume, then, that the patient went to that store, confidently expecting—for some reason that we do not know—to see her lover there. We must assume—again for a reason that we do not know—that she had cause to know in what part of the store she would find him if he were there, for the store is a large place, Mrs. Garvan."

"Yes."

"We are compelled to assume that a man did appear before her there, whom she had no occasion to suppose would be there, but in whom she instantly saw—and here is the point—not only a messenger from that other man, the lover, but also entire confirmation of the fear that had taken her there, and which had brought about the mental strain under which she was laboring at the time.

"Mrs. Garvan, it is my belief, in summing up the case, as I see it, that the lover is still somewhere on the other side of the ocean, or is here in hiding until that message to the patient could be delivered—and that he should be found. I hope I have been able to suggest something helpful to you, madam."

"Indeed you have, doctor. I had not thought of it at all in the light in which you put it. I had thought only of the possible lover."

"The man she saw at the store could not have been the lover—if she was stricken with aphasia. He must have been another man; but also a man who was conversant with the facts that had been troubling the patient."

"Very well, sir. Now, as to another point," said Adelina.

"Yes? What is it?"

"I suppose you will think it a very foolish question, sir."

"Let me hear it, first, before I decide as to that, please."

"Taking the case of aphasia in a given patient—in this one, for instance."

"Yes?"

"Is there not, in such a case, always a subsciousness at work? and is there not some mental process that we can trace out, that might have actuated the patient's acts, after the moment that forgetfulness fell upon her?"

"That is not at all a foolish question. It is a very deep one; and I will reply yes, there must of necessity be such a subconscious condition. It is another question whether we will be able to trace it or not."

"We hear," said Adelina, "of men who are intoxicated with drink doing strange things of which they afterward have not the slightest recollection. Although induced by different causes, is not the consequence, and therefore the condition, about the same?"

"No. It is not the same at all, madam."

"But there is the subconsciousness working in each case."

"Yes; but the cases are not at all parallel. The subconsciousness that is working in the intelligence of a man in that condition, is the result of some previously conceived notion—while in aphasia, all preconceived notions are dispelled, and utter forgetfulness of what was to have been done is the result."

"Well, take this patient again—we will cling to that term, I think."

"Yes."

"At the store, when she encountered the man who was not her lover, but who was some sort of a messenger from him—when she saw in his presence there, a confirmation of her fears, and seeing him and it, and realizing it all, fell into a state of aphasia, at once, or within a very short time—what part of her cerebral functions would have been uppermost, in that case? What would you substitute for the subconscious state?"

"A perfectly conscious state, madam; but one that is without memory of anything whatever that is past."

"Oh!"

"A condition of mind in which only the present has existence, and in which the past is as dead as if it had never been alive."

"Then there was nothing to direct the steps of the patient, after that instant, when the attack came upon her?"

"Nothing. The condition is one of utter helplessness."

Adelina was silent.

"Suppose, Mrs. Garvan," said the doctor, after a moment, "that you should lean back in that chair upon which you are seated, close your eyes, and drop into deep sleep; suppose that you should awaken, presently, with all your mental powers alert and active, having forgotten nothing—in perfect health, mental and physical; suppose, however, that during your sleep, you had been transported to another planet where the outward and physical conditions, and the language are the same as here? You would be utterly lost, eh?"

"Yes."

"You would have your memory with you, of the past; but there would be no person in that other world who would know anything about your memories, or about the scenes you would describe to them."

"No."

"You would move about, hither and yon, with no aim but to find something that you recognized; a building, or a scene; not realizing that you were in another world entirely. There would be no subconscious knowledge to direct your steps."

"No."

"That would be a situation exactly like aphasia, without being aphasia at all. You would know that you were in another world; you would suppose merely that you were in another part of your own world. I don't think that I can give you a clearer idea than that, of the utter helplessness of the condition."

"I understand you. I was hoping—vainly, I see—that there might be something which would enable us to determine what Leila might have done, after the attack came upon her, in the store."

"I don't think there is, Mrs. Garvan," was the response.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LOST UMBRELLA.

When Nick Carter left the store, he called to the driver of a taxicab that was passing at the moment, and when it drew up at the curb, the detective said:

"I want you to take me to every hotel in the city, where a gentleman would stay, one after the other. I shall be in each one five or ten minutes, I suppose; perhaps longer; but in each case you are to wait for me till I come out, and you are to continue on to the next one on the list without further orders. Do you understand that?"

"Yes, sir."

"You may begin with the one nearest to us, now, and work along the list as you like, only I want no unnecessary loss of time, and you will get an extra fee for making haste, and for being as expeditious as possible."

"Yes, sir. I understand."

Nick climbed inside, and the vehicle started on its way; and it may be said, now, that while the day was not a stormy one, there was snow in the air, threatening. In a word, it was the sort of a day when one will carry an umbrella, if one has such a thing near at hand.

The Adams House came first; then The Tavern, the Parker House, Youngs, the Touraine, and so on through the list, and it is a long one, as can be imagined.

At each of the hotels, Nick sought the head porter, showed him the umbrella, and asked of each man the same form of questions, after exhibiting the umbrella he carried with him—the one he had just purchased:

"Have you seen, or do you know of a gentleman in a fur coat and silk hat—although he might be wearing a different hat to-day—who carries an umbrella with a handle like this one?

"Is there a gentleman stopping here who answers to this description?" And then he would repeat the description of the man as given by Miss Larkin.

"If you should see such a man, or notice such an umbrella—like this one—in the possession of any man, will you telephone to this number at once, after finding out his name, and where he is staying?

"Will you get your information about him, if possible, without letting him know that you want it, or why you want it?"

To each one he offered a substantial reward for the information, and then went on.

But all the rest of that day the answers were the same—and Nick visited every hotel in the city where there was any chance that the man would be found.

He was back again at the Touraine, for dinner, when another thought about it, that had entirely escaped him, occurred to him.

"The handle of the umbrella bore a monogram!" he exclaimed aloud—and the gentleman at an adjoining table looked up quickly, and replied:

"What is that, sir? Did you speak to me?"

Nick laughed aloud.

"No, I did not, sir," he said. "I beg your pardon, though. It is no wonder that you thought so. I am not in the habit of speaking my thoughts aloud, but I did that time."

"I see. Excuse me, too. I thought you said something about an umbrella, and as I found rather a valuable one to-day—one which I am sure the owner would be sorry to lose—I thought; well, I don't know what I did think, only that I happened to be wondering, at the moment, who it could have belonged to."

"You found an umbrella to-day, you say?" Nick asked, interested, although he did not suppose for an instant that it had any relation to his own puzzle of the moment."

"Yes; a beauty, too. An expensive one, with a gold handle, and——"

"And a monogram engraved upon it, made of the letters J, H, and C?" asked Nick.

"By Jove, sir, you're right," exclaimed the man. "Is it yours?"

"No. It is not mine, and I do not even know the man who owns it, so I cannot take it away from you, if I would. But wait a moment. Let us be sure about it."

He called to the head waiter and sent him to the rack after his umbrella, after showing the number of his check; and when it was brought to him, he passed it over to the man at the adjoining table.

"Is the umbrella you found like that one?" he asked.

"Exactly like it," was the instant reply; "only here, the initials are N and C."

"Yes. That is the only difference between the two, I was told. Perhaps you would let me look at the one you found—and tell me where you found it?"

"Certainly. It is in my room. I will get it as soon as I have finished here; or we may go to my room together, to see it. I found it in a cab."

"In a cab. Good. Then, perhaps, you could help me to find that cab again, sir? I should be very grateful if you would do that."

"Oh, I have no objection; but you will pardon me for exhibiting a small amount of curiosity, won't you? Why are you so interested in the umbrella that you exclaimed about it, just now, that the handle bore a monogram?"

"I have been searching all day long for the man who owned that umbrella," replied the detective. "It was one part of the description I had of him—that umbrella; that is why I bought the mate to it."

"You must be interested in the man, I should say."

"I am," said Nick. "He possesses just one little bit of information that I am very anxious to share with him; that is all."

"Maybe you would pass the tip along," said the man, with a sly wink. "I suspect it is that, isn't it?"

"Well, it is something in the nature of a tip. I will not deny that. But as I haven't got it yet, I could hardly pass it along to you, could I?"

"Not very well."

Presently they left their respective tables, and Nick went to the gentleman's room with him where he saw the umbrella. There was no doubt at all that it was the same one he had been looking for.

"Tell me about the cab, where you found it," said the detective, handing it back again, after he perceived that there was no further information to be had from it. "Where did you engage the cab, and how could we find that same cab and driver again, do you suppose?"

"I can reply to the first question; but the last one is too much for me. I am an utter stranger in the city, Mr. Carter;" for Nick had told his name, but not his business; and had learned that the gentleman's name was Buckley. "I got in from Washington, by way of New York, only an hour or so ago. I started to walk from the South Station, but found that the weather was much colder than I had supposed. I saw a cab passing me——"

"Pardon me. Was it going toward the station, or away from it?"

"Bless you, I don't know. I was utterly lost by that time, the way the streets had turned and twisted with me; I never saw the like of it. It was partly because I was so utterly lost that I hailed the cab. But, anyhow, it was going in the same direction that I was following."

"Well, Mr. Buckley, what else?"

"The umbrella was on the front seat of the cab when I entered it. I had ridden two or three minutes before I saw it, half under a robe that was folded and laid there. I examined it, found it quite to my liking, and adopted it; but with the mental reservation that I would advertise for the owner, in case Cabby happened to know nothing about him—which I thought likely."

"But did you speak to the cabby about it at all?"

"Not about the umbrella. I asked him who his last fare had been, and he said—now, what did he say?"

"Please try to remember," said Nick.

"Oh; I know. He said that he had taken a gentle-

man and a lady to some address in Summer Street. I don't remember what it was."

"Will you help me to find that cab driver?" asked Nick abruptly.

"Yes; if you will share the tip with me, when you get it. What is it on, the races in New Orleans, or grain, or stocks, or what?"

"I am afraid it isn't on anything in your line, Mr. Buckley, since you seem to be interested in speculative properties. No; I am only seeking to get trace of a friend of whom I have lost all trace."

"Is that straight, Mr. Carter?"

"Perfectly."

"Then I will help you to the last ditch, if I can. What shall we do first, to find that chap?"

"Wait a moment. It is possible that we can get track of him with very little trouble. We will go down together, now, and you shall point out the boy who came out to you when you arrived, and who took your grip from you to carry it into the hotel. It is barely possible that he may remember your driver."

"All right. Come ahead. It is early in the evening yet; perhaps we can do something to-night. What was that you were saying about the monogram, when you attracted my attention, Mr. Carter?"

"That referred to another possible chance I had of finding the man. I will also attend to that matter, after we have attended to this one."

But the boy who had taken Mr. Buckley's grip did not know the driver, although he did remember the cab, and he gave Nick the necessary information so that it could be found.

"We will take another one in a few moments and drive to the stables where the cab belongs," the detective said to Buckley. "In the meantime, will you wait here for a moment, till I attend to that other matter?"

"I'd rather come with you, if you don't mind," was the reply. "I confess that I would like to see how you work this thing. It interests me. I always thought that I would have made a good detective. Has that idea ever occurred to you?"

"Sometimes," said Nick, with a smile. "All right. Come ahead. I am going now to interview one of the public stenographers in this hotel. You can help me to pick out the most painstaking one in the lot. I believe there are three or four."

"What do you mean by the most painstaking?"

"The one who will give the most attention to detail."

A few minutes later Nick had selected one for himself.

"Miss Gordon," he said, after getting her name, "I know pretty nearly what your time is worth, and I want to engage all of it for a while. The work I want you to do may take you all night, and part of to-morrow, or it may not take so long; but I want it done quickly, and I will pay you twenty-five dollars for it—and add some to that, if it is thorough, and is done soon. Are you on?"

"Yes, sir," she replied, smiling with eagerness.

"You are to take the directory—the city directory, I mean—and also the two telephone directories, and search through them, writing down the names, addresses, and telephone calls of all the names that begin with the letter C, of which the initials are J H. Is that sufficiently clear?"

"I think so, sir. If there is a John H. Clark, and a James H. Clark, or a John H. or James H anything else that begins with C, you want all of them."

"Exactly. Will you begin at once, please?"

"Yes, sir."

"Thank you. Here is a ten-dollar bill in advance. I will look you up in the morning, to see how you are getting along. Now, Mr. Buckley, let us start."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MAN IN THE FUR COAT.

They found the cab driver without much trouble, and we need not explain all the details of the two hours it required to do so. The fact that he had had the mysterious man of the umbrella episode for a passenger nearly twenty-four hours after the disappearance of Leila made no difference to the investigation that Nick Carter was making.

"Do you remember this gentleman?" Nick asked him, indicating Buckley. "You had him for a passenger, this afternoon, and took him to the Touraine. Remember?"

"Yes, sir, I think I do," was the guarded reply.

"Do you know what this is?" Nick asked then, holding up a five-dollar bill.

"You bet your life I do, sir."

"Then, if your memory is properly refreshed, and can supply the information I want, you shall have it when we are through talking."

"Go on, sir, I ain't got anything to hide, that I know of."

"When Mr. Buckley got down out of your cab he asked you about the fare you had had last before him. Do you remember that?"

"Yes, sir; and I lied to him, thinking it was none of his business. That's what."

"Well, tell me the truth about it, now."

"I had a gentleman and a lady. I picked 'em up on Washington Street, near Winter. I drove 'em down Summer Street, to two hundred—the New England Building. The man went inside, and left the lady in the cab. He wasn't gone long, and came out, and I took 'em to South Station. They both got out, then——"

"You had only to cross the street to get there, cabby," said Nick.

"Well, I crossed the street, like the hen that crossed the road, sir; not because I wanted to, but because he told me to. Over there, he told me to wait. They went into the station together, and after a while the man came out alone; and he came to me and paid me, and said he had decided to walk. I hung around the station a few minutes, and I saw him go as far as the elevated road, and then I lost sight of him, and didn't see him any more. And then, after a little, I started away, and picked up this gentleman, and took him to the Touraine, and that is all I know about it."

"Describe the man to me."

"He had a fur coat, a plug hat, a black mustache, and was a little gray over the ears—and he had a wad uh money with him that was as big as your two fists. He could swear some, too, for he swore at a driver that splashed dirty snow onto him while he was paying me the fare."

"Describe the lady."

"She was a woman that would weigh close to a hundred and eighty; all of that, I should say. She was—well, what I call a strawberry blonde, only I don't think her hair growed so, for it looked to me as if it had been turning gray, and she had colored it. But she was a mighty good-looking woman, for all that, and diamonds? well, I should smile. She was one of the kind that has got past forty, and wants to look about thirty—and makes it go, too, if you don't get too close."

"I see," said Nick. "Now, have you ever seen that man before to-day?"

"Yes, sir. Once."

"When was that? And where?"

"Yesterday—about half-past five—in front of Hite's store."

"Was he alone, then?"

"Nope. He had another lady with him then; a young one—or a younger one, at least. She was mighty good-looking, too. She was hanging onto his arm, and he was looking up and down the street. I thought he was looking for a cab, and raised my hand at him, but he shook his head that he didn't want me. That is the way I remembered him when I saw him again."

"Did you see what became of him yesterday, after he shook his head at you?"

"Yes, sir. He was waitin' for an automobile—a big, gray car it was—that drove up to him just then, and he and the young woman got into it. I don't know which way they went."

"Describe the young woman."

"I can't very well; I wasn't close enough, only to see that she was dark, and was very pretty."

"Can you tell me anything about what she wore? What kind of a wrap did she have on?"

"One uh them long, seal-skin coats that come almost to the ground, and a fur hat of the same kind uh fur, too."

"Are you positive about the kind of fur in the hat and coat?"

"Yes, sir."

"It was not Persian lamb? You are sure of that?"

"Just as sure as I am that you are standing there, sir."

"Are you sure that they both entered the automobile?"

"Yes, sir."

"I think that is all that he can tell us, Buckley," said the detective. "Unless you can think of something more, cabby," he added. "Can you?"

"No, sir. That is all."

When Adelina left the office of the lawyer in the Ames Building, she returned to the store from which Leila Lancaster had disappeared so mysteriously.

She was convinced that the clew by which the missing girl could be traced was to be found there, somehow, but she could not have even suggested how it could be done.

It was still early in the day—while Nick was driving from hotel to hotel, asking the questions of head porters about the umbrella; and she sought again the counter over which Miss Saxton presided.

"Miss Saxton," she said, "I want to ask you just a few more questions about Miss Lancaster; may I?"

"Certainly; anything you like. I only hope that I can help you to find her," was the quick reply.

"Miss Pennoyer told me that you know Miss Lancaster by sight very well. Does your familiarity with her appearance date from a recent time—since she returned form abroad, I mean—or is it of longer standing than that?"

"I have known Miss Lancaster by sight ever since I can remember," was the reply. "She is just a little older than I am, but not much. I used to see her when I was a child, and she was, too. I lived in Newton, then, and her folks lived there, too. They were rich, and she was regarded as an heiress, and I used to wonder what that meant. Oh, yes, I have always known her, and she remembers me well enough to bow to me, although I don't think she noticed me at all when she was here yesterday. But she bought an umbrella of me, less than a month ago, and I reminded her that I used to know her by sight, when we were children."

"She has been away, out of the country, a long time, I suppose you know," said Adelina.

"Yes. I spoke about it when she talked with me that time, and she said she was very glad to be at home again."

"When you saw her here yesterday, did you see her speak to any person other than that gentleman?"

"I am not sure that she spoke to him. In fact, I don't think she did. She only looked at him, and it was as if she would like to strike him, too, I thought."

"Never mind that just now. Did you see her speak to any one else—just nod a recognition, even, to any lady or gentleman, other than that man?"

"Why, yes, I think I did see her do that, just before she stood in front of the man in the fur coat."

"Now, do you know who it was that she nodded to?"

"Yes. One of our regular customers, who lives out in the Back Bay section, where Miss Lancaster lives now. It was Mrs. Drummond."

"Do you know Mrs. Drummond's address?"

"No; but you can get it of the manager, or at the desk. She keeps an account here."

Adelina thanked the girl and walked away. She sought the manager, and had no difficulty in obtaining the address of Mrs. Drummond.

It was a very faint hope indeed that Leila might have encountered Mrs. Drummond again during the preceding afternoon, but it was worth trying, and Adelina decided to go there, at all events, and find out what Mrs. Drummond could remember about having seen her at the store.

She walked slowly along Washington Street until she came to Winter, thinking over all that had happened, and trying to evolve some idea that would help her in her task, when in the crowd on the sidewalk, she collided rather forcibly with a large, blonde woman who was hastening in the opposite direction.

Adelina turned to look at the woman who had run into her without a thought of apologizing for the act, apparently, and saw her meet a man toward whom she had been hurrying when the collision occurred.

He stood at the curb, as if he had been waiting for the woman, and as she went up to him, he signaled to a passing cab, and they entered it together.

Adelina saw the man pause to give directions to the driver, saw that he carried a gold handled umbrella, and that he wore a fur coat and a tall hat; and if she had waited, earlier in the day, while Nick Carter questioned Miss Larkin at the umbrella counter, she would have recognized in him the man who had been seen with Leila.

But she knew nothing of that. She had heard no description of the man at all, and she had noticed these present particulars about him only because he was so strikingly good to look at—so handsome, as she termed it to herself.

She watched the cab as it drove away, and for some unknown reason the thought came to her that she would know either of the passengers inside of it, if she should chance to see them again.

Then she went on, and made her call at the house of Mrs. Drummond, whom she was fortunate enough to find at home.

"Mrs. Drummond," she said, when that lady entered the room where Adelina was waiting, "I am a stranger to you. I am Mrs. Garvan, and I have been visiting my friend, Miss Lancaster, whom, I am told, you know."

"Oh, yes, I have a speaking acquaintance with Miss Lancaster," was the reply. "We don't happen to be on each other's calling lists, but that is principally because she has been absent from Boston a long time, and because she was quite young when she went away."

"Miss Lancaster has disappeared, and I am trying to find her," said Adelina. "We have kept it from the papers, thus far, but I suppose it will all appear tomorrow morning. I am rather afraid it will have to."

"Dear me! Disappeared? How amazing. Has she eloped, do you suppose?"

"No. We fear that something has happened to her. She was last seen at Hite's store, yesterday afternoon, Mrs. Drummond."

"Why, I saw her there yesterday, now that I think of it."

"Yes, madam, that is why I have called upon you; to see if you could tell me anything about it, that might be of assistance in seeking her."

"How perfectly dreadful. No; I am afraid that I cannot help you, much as I would like to do so."

"Perhaps, if you will let me ask you some questions about your seeing her yesterday, in the store, something may be said which will be of interest. May I?"

"Certainly. Certainly. Of course, Mrs. Garvan. Go right ahead," was the reply.

CHAPTER IX.

ADELINA STRIKES THE TRAIL.

"Mrs. Drummond," said Adelina, "about six months ago Miss Lancaster had an attack of aphasia, while on a visit to New York. Fortunately she fell at once into the hands of some good friends, and the attack quickly passed; but we fear that now there has been a repetition of the attack, and that she may not be so fortunate this time. That is why I am here; to learn all that I can about her, and about where she was seen yesterday, and whoever she may have been seen with."

"Aphasia? Dear me; what is that?" asked the woman.

"In a word, it is forgetfulness. One forgets one's own name, and all that."

"Oh, yes. How dreadful. I have heard about such things. It must be horrible."

"I suppose it is. You saw her at Hite's, yesterday, madam?"

"Yes."

"Can you tell me at what time it was that you saw her?"

"About ten minutes, or a little more than that, past five. I had an appointment at the store at five, and I was ten minutes late, I remember. I had just entered the place when I saw Miss Lancaster—near the umbrella counter, I think it was."

"Yes. That is what I was told. You nodded to her, and passed on. I know all about that meeting. But did you happen to see her again after that, madam?"

"Why, yes; I did."

"Ah; that is the point. Will you tell me about the second meeting with her?"

"Let me see. It was out in front of the store, when I was leaving there. Yes, that was it. I passed quite close to her, and spoke to her. I said: 'How do you do, Miss Lancaster?' but she did not reply to me, and I thought that she did not see me. I went on about my business, which consisted in getting home as soon as possible. That is all I know about her, Mrs. Garvan."

"Was she alone when you saw her that last time?"

"No; she was talking with a woman whom I did not know."

"Could you describe the woman to me?"

"The principal thing I noticed about her was the long, mink coat she wore; they were perfectly exquisite furs, Mrs. Garvan."

"But the woman herself, madam?"

"She was a made-up blonde, I think. Rather bold-looking, I thought, with eyes the same color as her hair, which must have been quite red when she was young—you know—a kind of a brown-red. She had full, red lips, and there was rouge on her cheeks that you could cut with a knife. I didn't like her looks at all, and wondered that Leila Lancaster would be seen talking to such a woman. She was a big woman, too; tall and heavy."

Adelina was thoughtful for a moment. Then she said:

"You have described a woman whom I have seen this afternoon, just before I came here to see you; you have described her quite well, in fact. When I saw her, there was a gentleman with her. Was there a man with them when you saw them yesterday afternoon?"

"N-no; I don't think so."

"You seem to hesitate about that reply, Mrs. Drummond."

"Well, I saw a man I know, standing near them, and I remembered at the time I wondered if he was with them, or if he was waiting for the made-up blonde. He is not a man whom I ever recognize at all, or permit to speak to me, although I have known him—who he is, you understand—ever since he was a boy. I used to know his people, but they are all dead now—all but one, and he ought to be dead. This one, too, for that matter. He is no good."

"One moment," said Adelina, feeling that she had a possible clew at last. "Let me describe the man I saw with the blonde woman, and see if it is the same one."

"Very well."

"He is very handsome to begin with; the sort of a man that a woman will look at the second time. Dark

mustache, and very white and even teeth. He wore a fur coat, a silk hat, and he carried a gold-handled umbrella."

"Yes, Mrs. Garvan; that is the man to a dot."

"And you say you know him?"

"I know who he is; thank Heaven I do not know him."

"For my purposes, it is the same thing, madam. Will you tell me his name, and give me his address, if you have it; or tell me how I can procure it, if you have not got it."

"You had better keep away from that man, Mrs. Garvan; you are altogether too good-looking a woman to be brought into contact with such a creature as I know him to be," said Mrs. Drummond, with emphasis.

"I am quite capable of caring for myself, Mrs. Drummond," said Adelina, with dignity. "All I want from the man is some information about yesterday."

"My dear, you could not depend upon a single word he would tell you. He is bad, through and through. He would rather lie to you than tell you the truth, even though the truth would serve him better than a lie."

"Nevertheless, I would like to know about him, if you will be so good as to tell me."

"Well, his name is Catlin."

"His full name, please; and his address, if you have it, madam?"

"Judson Harvey Catlin. I know, because he was named for his father, who was a good man, too, in his day, although his sons all went to the bad; and his daughters, too, for that matter. That is, they never amounted to anything, Mrs. Garvan. And now that I speak of the daughters, I wouldn't be surprised if that big blonde was one of them; the eldest. I have not seen her since she was a little girl, but I remember that she had red hair. She was about my age, and she married a foreigner and went abroad—let me think—nearly thirty years ago. Why, I believe it was Della Catlin, after all, and Judson must have been waiting for her while she talked with Miss Lancaster. But, how in the world they knew each other is more than I can guess."

"What is the married name of the woman? Do you recall that, Mrs. Drummond?"

"Yes. Higham. I remember it because I have been told—oh, ever so many years ago—that the man she married pronounced his name as if it were spelled Hi-ham. Funny, isn't it?"

"Quite. Yes. I suppose it was half-past five, at least, when you saw them, Mrs. Drummond?"

"Every bit of that; later if anything. Nearer a quarter to six, I should say."

"So we are to assume that those two were brother and sister. Now, have you the address of Mr. Judson Catlin?"

"No; but I can send you to a man who can give it to you, if he will. He is—why, what am I thinking of? The man is dead. He was a relative of the family, in some distant way, on the mother's side, which was the bad side, you understand? But his place is running yet, for I saw the sign, when I was driving past it the other day. But, my goodness, child, you don't want to go there."

"I would go anywhere, madam, if it would help in the search for Leila Lancaster," replied Adelina.

Madam shrugged her shoulders. Then, resignedly, she said:

"Very well. Probably somebody at Heckman's place of business would know the address of Judson Catlin. It is——"

"Pardon me. What name did you say?"

"The café? Heckman's. Charles J. Heckman was a brother of Judson Catlin's mother. He shot himself, in New York, and a good thing it was, too; and I have heard my husband say that Sam Catlin is now in prison over there. I never read the papers, but my husband always tells me all the news that he thinks will interest me. Sam went to New York when he was only a boy, and has lived there ever since. I have never known anything about him, only the general information that he has never amounted to anything—which was not at all surprising."

Adelina had to stop and think for a moment, for this news was surprising indeed.

She had found a clew at last, and she was thoroughly well aware of it; and she realized that it was of such vast importance that it was her duty to find Nick Carter at once, and tell him all about it.

However, she wished to obtain all the information that Mrs. Drummond could give to her, before that fortunate interview came to a close—and in order to do that thoroughly, she decided to take Mrs. Drummond further into her confidence.

"Madam," she said, with slow emphasis, "what you have told me is most surprising, and is of great value. If you will listen for a moment, I will tell you why; and then, I know that you will be glad to assist me with every bit of information you possess."

"I am prepared to do that already, Mrs. Garvan; but, of course, I will be glad to hear anything that you will tell me," was the reply.

"You know, of course, that Leila Lancaster had a brother, who also went to the bad; or, at least, was wild and reckless?" asked Adelina.

"Yes. I have heard as much."

"Well, madam, he got into bad company through this same man, Heckman, whom you have mentioned."

"I can well believe that, Mrs. Garvan."

"He was foully murdered, in New York, six months ago—just at the time that Leila returned from abroad. A man by the name of Coyne committed the deed, but Heckman, and the Sam Catlin you have mentioned, were involved in the crime. That is why Heckman shot himself, and it is why Samuel Catlin is now in prison. Coyne has been executed, and Catlin and the others who were implicated are life prisoners at Sing Sing."*

"Well, I am glad to hear that Sam Catlin has got his deserts at last. That is all that I can say about it, Mrs. Garvan. I only wish that Judson was there, with his brother, for I honestly believe he is the worst villain of them all. He is so clever and so handsome."

"Don't you see, Mrs. Drummond, that the very fact that Judson Catlin and his sister were near Leila Lancaster, at the time she disappeared yesterday, suggests that they were instrumental in that disappearance? Don't you see that now?"

"I should say there was no doubt of it, under the circumstances. But why?"

"Formerly, there was a plot to get Miss Lancaster's fortune away from her. Even her own brother was concerned in that, although it is charitable to suppose that he really did not know that his sister was to be the victim of what he was doing."

Mrs. Drummond uttered an expressive grunt, but said nothing.

"Leila expected to see some one at Hite's store yesterday, but she did not tell me who it was. Later, after she parted with me, she was seen talking to a man; it must have been this Judson Catlin. Still later, you saw her talking with Judson Catlin's sister, while he was remaining in the background, presumably out of sight of Leila. To-day, just before I came here to see you, I saw Judson Catlin and his sister together; saw them enter a cab, and drive away from Washington Street, near Winter. Mrs. Drummond, at this moment I have not one single doubt that those two persons know where Leila Lancaster is."

"Nor I. It's as certain as a church," said the woman.

*See two preceding issues NICK CARTER WEEKLY, "A Shot in the Dark" and "The Seven Schemers."

"So I shall go from here to Heckman's Café, to get the address of Judson Catlin, if it is to be procured."

"You'd better wait, my dear, till my husband gets home, and let him go there for you—or with you, at least. He'd go in a minute. He's really the best man that ever lived."

"I haven't a doubt of it, and if he were here I should be glad of his assistance; but it will be hours before he comes home, and I must not wait. No; I will go now, thank you all the same."

"You are very welcome, I'm sure; and if there is anything more that I can do, come to see me, or call me up on the telephone," was the hearty reply.

CHAPTER X.

THE WEB OF THE SPIDER.

It was after two in the afternoon when Adelina left the house of Mrs. Drummond, and she had herself driven at once to the address of Heckman's Café; but when she left the conveyance that had taken her there, she entered another place first, and used the telephone, calling up Leila Lancaster's house, and asking first if any news of her had reached there, and then if Mr. Carter had returned.

The negative answer to both questions decided her; and after instructing the butler, who had answered her call, to tell Mr. Carter to wait there for her, if he should return, and that she had important news for him, she rang off.

For a moment she hesitated before the door of the café. It was not a place for a young and lovely woman to enter boldly; but she had an errand and a duty to perform, and so, after considering for a moment, she went boldly inside.

She stepped up close to the cigar show case, at the end of the bar nearest the door, and one of the white-coated bartenders hastened toward her, with a smirking smile upon his hard face.

"What can I do for you, madam?" he asked.

"I came here to get the address of Mr. Judson Catlin," she replied. "Will you please give it to me at once?"

"Jud Catlin? Sure, ma'am." Then he turned to another of the bartenders, and called aloud to him: "Say, Ben, what's Jud's address now, do you know?"

"No. Who wants him?" was the reply.

"The lady. Says she wants to see him at once."

"Well, he's due in here about half-past four or five.

Hold on a minute. Ask her to wait. Maybe The Cat knows the address. I'll ask him."

"The Cat," said Adelina, with disgust, convinced that the man was making fun of her; but the bartender who had first addressed her said quickly:

"No, ma'am; he doesn't mean the cat, really. That is a nickname for a man we know, who is now in one of the back rooms. You just wait a minute, and maybe we can find Jud for you. You ain't the first lady that has come here to ask for him, by a long shot, and sometimes, he wants to see them, and sometimes he don't; see? But I guess he'll see you all right. I would, if I was in his place."

The man turned away with a grin, and Adelina was compelled to restrain her fiery temper at this obvious insult; but she knew that she must face the natural consequences of entering such a place at all.

Had she but known it, "The Cat" was a nickname for Judson Catlin himself, and it was not at all unappropriate, either—and two or three minutes later, that handsome rascal sauntered leisurely into the café from one of the rooms at the rear of it.

But the moment his eyes fell upon Adelina he came forward toward her with quickened steps, removed his shining silk hat, and bowed very low before her.

"Please step this way, madam," he said hastily. "This is no place for you to be seen;" and without waiting for her to say yes or no, he turned and led the way toward the door of the room he had just quitted; nor did he give her an opportunity to speak until they were well inside that room, and he had closed the door, and moved forward a chair for her to occupy.

It was a small room containing a table and four chairs; just a room for private drinking parties, but it was away from the glare of the café, and from the curious gaze of the men she had seen lounging there, and she was grateful for that much, at least.

She noticed, too, that there was a door from that room which gave upon the street, and understood that she would presently be able to leave without again passing into and through the barroom.

She ignored the chair that Catlin offered her.

"You wished to see me, madam?" he said. "Pardon me, but I do not know your name. Won't you be seated?"

"Thank you, no; and my name doesn't matter, unless you insist upon it. I came to you to request that you take me at once to Miss Lancaster."

His handsome eyes narrowed slightly; it was the only sign of surprise that he made.

"Miss Lancaster?" he repeated after her.

"Yes. You know where she is. I wish to go to her, or to send for her, at once. You and your sister —Mrs. Higham—were seen with her yesterday afternoon, about the time she disappeared, and of course you know where she is," replied Adelina.

Judson Catlin's eyes narrowed still more. His white teeth were bared in a studied smile. He stroked his shapely mustache with his tapering, manicured fingers —and he hesitated so long a time before he replied, that Adelina was on the point of speaking again, when he did it instead.

"Pardon me," he said, with that same easy smile. "Your question, and your statement, has taken me quite by surprise. I hesitated, because I was wondering whether it would be better to tell you the truth, or to hide it from you. But the truth will be better, of course."

"The truth is always best," she retorted.

"Certainly. You have a conveyance waiting for you, outside, of course? Or friends are with you? Let me send out for them, won't you?"

"No. I came alone," she replied, before she thought what she was saying.

"Ah," he said, and he smiled again, and showed his teeth, and his eyes glistened strangely. "In that case it is best to tell you the truth at once, and then I will send for a conveyance, and take you to Miss Lancaster—for I do know where she is. She is ill, in fact; quite ill, and if you are her friend, she will be delighted to see you. Wait, I will order a conveyance at once. We can get to her in a very short time;" and before she could say a word to prevent it, he had passed from the room, leaving her alone.

He returned in a moment, smiling and bowing, having donned the fur coat that she had seen him wearing earlier that afternoon. He was drawing on his gloves as he stood before her, looking the picture of a handsome gentleman.

"We are fortunate," he said. "I found a friend outside, in the café, who has his car here with him, and he has loaned it to me for half an hour or so, which will be as long as we will require it. If you will step this way, madam, you will not need to pass through the café again." He stepped to the door and put his hand upon the latch.

"May I not go to her alone? Can you not send me there?" she asked hesitatingly.

"I could not think of permitting you to leave this place alone, madam. Certainly not; and it will be

necessary that I should be with you, when we arrive at the house where Miss Lancaster is staying."

He opened the door, and stood aside for her to pass; and there seemed to be nothing else for her to do.

Regretting that she had not worn a veil that would hide her features, Adelina stepped through the doorway, upon the side street, where a big touring car with a limousine body stood in waiting; and Judson Catlin stepped forward at once and opened the door of the car, holding it so, for her to enter.

In that instant she hesitated; then, realizing that she could not back out at that point, lest she should entirely lose sight of this handsome villain, she went forward with a toss of her head, and a determination to see the adventure through to the end.

Evidently Judson Catlin had already given the chauffeur his instructions, for he said no word to the man now; and soon they were threading their way through the other vehicles that thronged the streets.

"Where are you taking me?" Adelina asked then, realizing that she was in for it, so to speak.

"To Miss Lancaster, of course," he replied quickly, and looking at her with his carefully studied smile, but with a glance that had somehow grown bolder, although there was not a thing about it for her to resent.

"Will you tell me where that is, Mr. Catlin?" she asked.

"Why, yes. It is out toward Newton; but it is not very far; the roads are fairly good, and we shall get there very quickly."

"I would like you to stop the car somewhere, if you please, so that I can send a telephone message to some friends," she said, after another pause.

"Certainly. We will attend to that presently," he replied.

"You said that Miss Lancaster is ill," she said. "Will you tell me what is the matter with her, and why her friends at her home have not been communicated with? It seems very strange that they should have been kept in ignorance of her condition, sir."

"Ah; yes; that is precisely what I told my sister. But—well, women have their own method of doing things, you know, and Mrs. Higham insisted that she would go to Miss Lancaster's home to-day, while she was in town, and tell them all about it. She thought that was the best way, and as she is much older than I, I had to accede; don't you see?"

"What is the matter with Miss Lancaster, that she could not telephone to her home, of her own accord?" Adelina asked.

"It is a very strange thing that is the matter with her, madam," was the slow reply. "I am not sure that you will understand it. You see, Miss Lancaster has been stricken with a strange malady; I believe it is called aphasia; she has forgotten who she is."

Adelina was reassured by this confidence, which she thought was frankness itself, although she could not yet understand why word had not been sent to Leila's home, if all was as it should be; but she answered unguardedly:

"Nevertheless, she should have recognized you, sir. She knows you, for you were seen in conversation with her at Hite's store, just before she disappeared. You were seen with her near the umbrella counter."

"You seem to be very well posted, indeed, madam," he replied, with a slow smile.

"I ought to be by this time. I have been searching for traces of her ever since half-past five o'clock yesterday afternoon."

"Indeed? And have others been searching for her, also? Have you notified the police?"

"No. The police have not been called into the case yet. We suspected that it might be another attack of aphasia; she has had one before."

"You make use of the plural, nevertheless, so some one has been assisting you in the search, madam?"

"Yes. Mr. Carter is seeking her," was the cold reply.

"Mr. Carter? Do you mean Nick Carter, the detective, by any chance?" he asked quickly.

"That is precisely whom I do mean," she retorted.

"Ah; that is well. And you will be the one to discover her, instead of the great detective—unless, indeed, it was he who sent you to me?"

"No. He——"

"Then you will really have stolen a march on him, madam; no? Or does he already know what you have discovered?"

"I am afraid that he does not. That is why I wish to use a telephone. I wish——"

"Oh, yes. I understand. Well, we will find one presently."

"I would like to attend to it at once, if you please. I will ask you to stop at the first place that the chauffeur can find, where there is a telephone."

"Certainly, madam. I will speak to him and give him the necessary directions—unless you think it will answer when you arrive at the house where Miss Lancaster now is."

"No. At once, please. At once. This moment."

"Very well."

He bent forward as if to call to the chauffeur. One hand was in the pocket of his coat, but he withdrew it quickly, and Adelina attempted to cry out, for she detected the odor of chloroform then. But he threw his other arm around her, and pressed a saturated handkerchief against her face.

The struggle was very short.

CHAPTER XI.

NICK CARTER ALSO FINDS THE TRAIL.

It was between three and four o'clock in the afternoon when these things happened to Adelina—while Nick Carter was still making the rounds of the hotels, questioning the head porters, in his search for the man with the umbrella; and we know what he did, after that, and how busy he was, up to the time that he went with Mr. Buckley, to find the cab driver in whose cab that umbrella had been found.

It was nine o'clock in the evening when Nick and Buckley parted.

The detective could not think of another thing that could be done that night, and yet he was reluctant to abandon the chase while anything could be accomplished.

For a moment he stood at a corner, and pondered in his thoughts the question whether he should return at once to Leila's home, and talk over the matter with Adelina. He figured that it would be a good idea to exchange confidences as to what each one had accomplished during the time that had passed since they parted that morning.

He had much to tell to her, and he had no doubt that she would have thought of considerable to tell him. He compromised with himself by seeking a telephone and calling up the house.

"No, sir," said the butler, over the telephone, "Mrs. Garvan has not returned, and there has not been any word concerning Miss Lancaster. But Mrs. Garvan telephoned to me, early in the afternoon. She said that if you came here, you were to wait for her, as she had something of importance to tell you."

"You have heard nothing from her since then?"

"No, sir."

"And what time was it when she telephoned?"

"I think it was shortly after one o'clock, sir."

"Did she say anything more to you than what you have repeated to me already?"

"No, sir."

Nick turned away from the telephone with some misgivings in his mind. It was not like Adelina to remain out till that time, alone, unless something of supreme importance was detaining her. He could not imagine her as being on any certain trail, at that time of the night, without having sought to inform him about it.

"Confound that umbrella episode," he thought. "I wonder if it has led me astray, altogether?" And then: "I wonder if that girl at the hotel has made out a partial list of those names, by this time? I think I will go there, and find out; only, I doubt if she would be there at this hour. She would have taken the work home with her, probably. Anyhow, I will go there."

But when he arrived there, he found that Miss Gordon had taken her work home with her, and also that she had a telephone in the house where she lived, so he called her up.

"Oh, yes," she told him, when he had her at the phone. "I am getting along famously. I have it nearly done. There are any quantity of names that begin with C in the directories, you know, and a good many that have the two initials, J. H, attached to them. But I think I shall have quite finished within an hour or so more."

"May I come there and look over the list that you have already made?" Nick asked.

"Certainly. Come at once; and fortunately, it is not far;" and she gave him the street and number.

"Oh, I know how to find it," said Nick. "I will be there within twenty minutes, or less."

"You see," she told him when he entered the room where she waited for him at her home, "it occurred to me that you might want the H. J.'s as well as the J. H.'s or, I would have quite finished by this time. But here is the list, as far as I have completed it. I have found a good many in the city directory, that are not in the telephone directories, and, strange as it seems, quite a number in the telephone books, that are not in the city directory at all."

Nick nodded and took the list in his hand.

It was alphabetically arranged, just as she had taken it from the books, and therefore the Ca's were at the top of it; and he had not read very far down before he encountered the name of Catlin.

Now that name Catlin was a significant one to Nick Carter, because of its relation to the case he had had in connection with the murder of Leila's brother, and the subsequent one when she had suffered from the attack of aphasia, as stated heretofore.

Under the name Catlin, Miss Gordon had found nine whose names began with the initials J. H., and seizing upon a sheet of paper, he copied them off hastily.

"Miss Gordon," he said, rising, "something tells me that I must make haste. I have a habit of obeying certain kinds of impulses that I experience, and I am under the influence of one of them now. I shall leave you to complete what you are doing, and will call at the hotel in the morning for what remains of the list. Just now I think I will hasten away with these few names that I have copied from your list."

Outside, at the curb, he paused for a moment, thinking; then he gave the direction he had determined upon to the driver.

"Police headquarters," he said sharply; "and quickly."

"I want to see Chief Waters," he said, when he arrived there. "I do not know his house address, but if——"

"The chief is here now," was the reply. "You are Mr. Carter?"

"Yes."

"I think the chief will see you at once, Mr. Carter. Just step through that door, if you please, and you will find him. He is just about leaving, too."

Nick went inside.

"Hello, chief," he said. "Glad to see you. Can I have about five minutes of your time?"

"You can have an hour, or more, if you want it, Nick. What's up now?" was the cheery reply.

Nick pulled a chair close to the desk of the chief, and laid the short list of nine names upon the table. It contained four John H. Catlins, two James H. Catlins, one Jerome M., one Jackson H., and one Jeremiah H. Nick placed one of his hands on top of the paper.

"Chief," he said, "yesterday afternoon a man bought a gold-handled umbrella, at Hite's store. The handle bore the monogram made of the letters J. H., and C. There were two umbrellas just alike; the other one bore the letters N. C. and this is it;" showing his own, that he had purchased. "The man who bought the other one had both to select from, and if he had desired to have the monogram effaced, and another one substituted for it, or if he had not wished to substitute another one, he would have selected this one, instead of that other, with three letters in the monogram, for the reason that this one would be much more easily altered—and with less expense. Do you agree with me?"

"It sounds logical enough. What of it?"

"Well, as I say, he had both umbrellas to select from, and he selected the other one. So I conclude that the three initials in the monogram on that one, happened to be the initials of his own name—just as this one happened to bear the initials of my name. See?"

"Yes."

"The person who ordered the umbrellas, originally, doesn't count; but I am very anxious to find the J. H. C. who made that purchase yesterday. Never mind what for; I will get to that later on."

"Well?"

"You know about that case in New York—the murder of young Lancaster?"

"Yes."

"Now, there was a Catlin mixed up in that; a Samuel Catlin; he's a lifer at Sing Sing now."

"I know that, too."

"I had a stenographer make out a list for me, containing all the J. H. C.'s in the directories. She hasn't quite finished it yet, but that name Catlin interested me, and I have brought all the Catlins here with me, to have you look them over—the names, I mean, of course."

"I understand."

"I want you to tell me, if you know, if there is a Catlin on this list, who is any relation to the Sam Catlin who is now a lifer at Sing Sing. If there is, I think I will look him up to-night."

The chief read the list over slowly.

"No," he said; "but if it will interest you to know it, there is a brother of Sam Catlin here, in Boston now, whose name is Judson Harvey Catlin—and if you are looking for the slickest article out of prison, he is the man. I know the whole bunch of them, and I always had an idea that Sam was the best of the lot. But you can't always tell, Nick."

"No. Tell me about this man you have mentioned. How old is he, and what does he look like?"

"He is the youngest of all the children of old J. H. —who was a good man, by the way, although his wife came from bad stock. Still, I never knew anything directly against her, either. You see, I am an old man now, and I remember a good ways back, Nick."

"I know."

"That fellow Heckman, by the way, was their uncle —Sam's, and Judson's, and Della's—she was the oldest. She married, and went abroad; name of Higham now. She has two or three sons, too, so I've heard."

"Get down to Judson Catlin, chief."

"He is a handsome chap, and a lady killer, or thinks he is. Dresses like a fashion plate. I saw him to-day in Washington Street, near Winter, with his sister, Mrs. Higham, and I hadn't seen her before in years. That is why I took particular notice of them. He had on a fur coat and a plug hat, and he looked the part of the masher all right."

"Black mustache, and all that?" asked Nick quickly.

"Yes."

"He is the man I want, chief. Where can I get a tab on him?"

"I don't know, at this time of the night. It is after ten, and he would be playing poker somewhere, by this time, likely enough; and I haven't the least idea where he would go. All the regular places are closed now; we closed 'em, you know; but there are plenty of so-called private games running, for all that."

"I've got to find him; that's all there is about it, chief; and I must find him to-night, too."

"You might get a line on him at Heckman's Café. That's his regular hang-out."

"I'll go there."

"Shall I go along with you? I guess I could make 'em talk, down there, when you couldn't, Nick."

"Yes. I wish you would; and, say, if we don't succeed in getting a line on him there, we will look up that sister of his, that you spoke about, if you know where to find her."

"I haven't the least idea where to find her—but I guess she can be found, all the same. I know of two or three different people who ought to know where she is, if she is staying in the city, which is likely;

or out in one of the Newtons. You can tell me what it is all about, after we start, Nick."

"Yes. I'll do that, chief. Now, before we start, I want to use that telephone."

"All right; only remember that there isn't much time. The cafés close here at eleven sharp, you know, and it's getting toward that now."

Nick used the phone to find out if Adelina had gone home yet, and we already know what the answer was.

CHAPTER XII.

NICK CARTER'S MASTER STROKE.

But the chief had been more confident of his powers in getting information out of the men at Heckman's, than the circumstances warranted, as it turned out.

He was assured, by the same bartender who had first replied to Adelina, when she visited the place, that Jud Catlin had been in and out of the café several times that day, but that he had no idea where Catlin was then; the chief was also assured that Jud Catlin's address was not known there at all.

While the chief was talking, Nick Carter leaned over and whispered to him.

"Keep up the talk till I return," he said. "I want to run outside a minute."

"He did run, too; directly across the street, to an all-night lunch room that he had noticed there—but it had no telephone, and he hastened out again. Three doors farther along the street he did succeed in finding a telephone, and called central.

"Central," he asked, "are you at the same exchange that supplies service to Heckman's Café?"

"Yes, sir; I am on the same board, too."

"Good. I suppose there are two or three of you working on that board, aren't there?" he asked.

Two. Yes."

"Well, there is a nice five-pound box of candy coming to you and your friend who is sitting next to you, if you will give me your name, so I can send it, and will then do just what I ask you to do for me."

"That sounds good," the girl replied, "if it isn't anything against the rules; and I can't leave the board, you know."

"I don't want you to leave it, and it is not against the rules; anyhow, the chief of police is with me, across the street, and he will back what I say."

"Oh. Well, sir, what is it?"

"Within the next few minutes I think you will get a call from Heckman's Café, to connect them with some number—I don't know where. But the man at the other end of the wire will probably be a Mr. Jud Catlin, or it will be some person who will be asked to deliver a message to him. Understand?"

"Yes."

"I want you to keep your key open, and to listen to what is said, and to remember it—and the chief and I will come to the exchange together, to have you tell us about it, in a very little while. I also want you to be particular to get the number of the telephone at which the answer is made, so that you can give it to us—and the address of the house where that telephone is located. Have you got all that?"

"Yes."

"And will you attend to it?"

"Yes."

"All right; if it wasn't so late, I'd bring the candy with me; but I will give you the price of it, and more, too, when I get there, which will be as well. Now, one word more."

"Yes?"

"Get your friend next to you to do all the work on the board, while you are expecting that call, and give your whole attention to that when it comes in. It ought to be rung up inside of twenty minutes, now—or less; as soon as eleven o'clock is past."

"That will be only ten minutes. I will attend to it," was the reply.

The detective hastened back to the café; and there he adopted an entirely new manner. He interrupted the chief, and did some talking for himself.

"I want that address, and I want it badly," he said sharply, to the bartender; "and I want Jud Catlin, too, and I'll get him before the night is over, or I miss my guess."

The chief looked around at Nick in pained surprise, and Nick, who was standing close to him, pinched his arm, to make him understand that he was bluffing for a purpose. He spoke to the bartender again:

"I know that you fellows here know where he is," he said, "and I'll find a way to make you give up, too: I'm Nick Carter, from New York, and I'm here after Jud Catlin. Come on out chief."

"Well, I'll be——" the chief began, as soon as they were outside the café; but the detective interrupted him.

"All a bluff, chief," he said. "I wanted to make those fellows telephone to Catlin, as soon as the place closes; and they will do it now, too, if they know how to reach him over the wire. Now, do you know where the telephone exchange is located, that handles that particular telephone?"

"Sure. Want to go there?" asked the chief understandingly.

"Yes. Right now. But I won't keep you out any longer, if you would rather go home."

"Home? I should say not. I want to see this thing out, now; and besides, you haven't told me yet what it is all about."

On the way to the exchange, Nick told him all about the case, and received many a nod of understanding from the chief in reply. At the exchange, he quickly found the girl with whom he had talked.

"Here is the price of that candy, at a dollar a pound," he said, giving her a bill.

"But nothing has come in yet," she told him.

"I think it will come very soon, now, and when it does, give me a receiver, and let me listen; two, if you can, so that the chief can listen, also."

"Here," she said, and handed a headpiece to each one. "Now, if you will take two chairs, I will switch on the connection, when the call comes in."

Ten minutes more they sat there, listening, and rarely speaking, and Nick was beginning to fear that he had been mistaken in his supposition, after all, when the call came.

The telephone girl called a low warning to them, and they gave all their attention to the matter in hand.

Nick glanced toward the chief, and met the eyes of that official, for both had recognized the voice of the same bartender to whom they had talked in the café; and the voice of a woman answered, at the other end of the wire.

At the sound of that voice, the chief winked knowingly at Nick Carter, by which act the detective understood that he recognized that voice, too.

The conversation to which they listened was as follows:

"Hello. I want to speak to Jud, please. He told me to call him, there, if anything came up that was important, and he'll think this is mighty important when he hears it; take it from me."

"Who are you?"

"One of the bartenders, at Heckman's. He calls me Punch, because he says I can make such good ones. Tell him that, and he will know it is all right."

"Very well," replied the woman. "Hold the wire."

There was a short wait, and then:

"Hello, Punch. What's bothering you now?" and again, at the sound of the voice, the old chief winked at Nick Carter.

"Say, Jud," the bartender replied, "there's the devil to pay down here."

"What's up?"

"The chief of police has been in here looking for you, and you'd better fly the coop. Nick Carter, from New York, was with him, and he has got it in for you for fair; he'll round you up good and plenty, if he has a show."

There was a moment of hesitation, and the murmur of voices at one end of the wire, while Jud probably talked it over with his sister. Then:

"What is it all about, Punch?"

"Dunno; unless it is the girl who was there this afternoon, that you took away with you."

The chief looked an interrogation at Nick, and Nick nodded an affirmative, to indicate that he knew what they were talking about, although he had not told anything of that to the chief, because he did not know about it. But the words told him at once what had happened to Adelina.

"Do they know where to find me?" asked Jud.

"Naw; of course not. We ain't such guys down here, as to tell 'em that, Jud. But, say, that Nick Carter put up a big talk. Maybe he's got something else onto you. Ain't you been keepin' straight lately, Jud? What have you been doing, anyhow? Bob wants to know, and so do I. We ain't looking to get ourselves mixed up in anything since we bought this place."

By which Nick understood that the men at Heckman's Café knew nothing of the affair of Leila Lancaster."

"Oh, don't you worry, Punch," was the reply. "It is all right. They have missed the girl, and have traced her there, that is all. I'll turn her loose in the morning, so you needn't worry about it."

"Got her there now?"

"Yes. She is all right, too. Nothing has happened to her. She is unharmed, you can take that from me, Punch. My sister is looking out for her."

"Well, Bob and I don't like it, your taking her away from here the way you did, in Morton's car. He don't like it much, either. He is here now, and he wanted to say——"

"Oh, never mind what he says. I'll make it all right with him. The girl hasn't been harmed, or even frightened. She knew something that I wanted kept still for a while, that's all; and she will promise to keep still about it, too, before morning; and about this, too."

"Well, what are you going to do about the tip I just gave you. It won't be healthy for you to show up here right away, Jud."

"I shall not do that. I'll—well, I'll keep under cover for a while, till this blows over."

"Shall I call you up again, and tell you if anything happens?"

"No. I won't be here, after—after daylight."

"I wouldn't stay there till then, if I was you. The chief and Nick Carter will find you, if you do."

"Not before I have gone, they won't. Thank you, Punch."

"Say, Jud, maybe you'd better skip out for a while."

"That is what I am thinking of doing, Punch."

"Where to?"

"I don't know. I'll let you know that later."

"Want any money? I can let you have five hundred."

"No. I've got enough."

"Then that's all right. Any messages for any of the bunch?"

"Yes. Tell everybody to say, if I am asked for, that I have gone South; make it Florida. That will do as well as any place."

"Is that all?"

"Tell Morton not to worry about his gray car, and the fact that I had it. He has got it by this time, and nobody will ever be any the wiser as to what I used it for. There will be nothing coming to him for it."

"All right. Look out for that Nick Carter. He looked like bad medicine to me."

"Oh, I'll look out for number one; you can bet on that. Good-by, Punch."

"Good-by."

Thus ended the conversation.

CHAPTER XIII.

CATCHING UP WITH A HIDDEN CRIME.

The address at which that other telephone was located was quickly obtained from the manager of that exchange. It was some distance out Columbus Avenue, and the chief, as well as the detective, appreciated the fact that there was no time to be lost in getting there.

It had been easy to understand that Jud Catlin had taken the alarm, all right, and that he meant to get away with the least possible delay—but while he might have made his own personal escape at once, there was the woman, Mrs. Higham, to consider, who had to be taken care of also.

And then there were the two girls, for now Nick Carter had not the least doubt that Adelina had been the girl referred to in the telephone conversation, and that she had in some way fallen into the power of Jud Catlin.

It was plain that she had gone to the café to interview him, and that she had known so much that he had been made desperate enough to take chances in abducting her. It was a good thing for the facial beauty of Jud Catlin that it was Nick Carter, instead of Patsy, that was on the way to interview him now.

Outside, as they were getting into the cab, the chief said:

"Hadn't we better take a couple of my men along with us, Nick?"

"No. We won't need them, I think, chief. And, besides, I don't want to spare the time. It is my opinion that Catlin was already planning to leave the city, and his arrangements may be about completed; so nearly so that he may be able to start at once. We ought not to lose a minute in getting there."

"You're right, Nick."

"Just why he should abduct Leila, I don't see," said Nick.

"Nor I; but we will find that out when we have rescued her, probably. But there are two abductions in this case. What did he take the other one for?"

"Oh, Adelina found out his connection with the case, somehow, and instead of waiting to tell me about it, went ahead on her own hook; and she has doubtless given herself away, so that Jud had to detain her, until he could make his own get-away. That is about the size of it, as near as I can figure it out."

"They are a bad lot, those Catlins, Nick."

"Sure thing, that."

"And the woman—this Mrs. Higham, is as bad as the rest of them, I suppose. There isn't any doubt that she has helped in this thing."

"Not the slightest."

"Say, there is a Cunarder that goes out with the tide in the morning—about nine; I'll bet a red apple that that is their lay, Nick."

"Probably."

"And Jud wasn't saying a word to any of his friends about it, was he?"

"Not a word."

"For that very reason you can bet there is money in it somewhere. Jud is a gambler, and he is also a thief, if he gets a chance to steal; although we have never got the kibosh onto him yet. But we've got him now, just where I want him."

They stopped the cab a block away from the house to which they were bound, and went forward on foot.

"Jud will be on the lookout for us, doubtless," said Nick, as they approached the house. "I don't mean that he will be actually expecting us yet, but he will be very wary. We won't ring any bells, chief."

"All right. You can take the lead now, if you think you can get into the house without ringing the bell."

"Oh, I'll get into it, all right. You have forgotten that little picklock of mine."

"No, I haven't."

"We will walk directly past the house, a few steps, and then return to it," said the detective, and they did so; but seeing nothing of any face looking out at them, they quickly ran up the steps to the front door—and in a trice, Nick had used that little instrument of his with which he manipulated door locks, and had noiselessly thrown open the door.

They stepped into the hall together. There was a dim light burning there, sufficient to admit of their seeing their way about. A brighter light was streaming from under a door at the end of the hall.

Nick approached it, and listened, and he could hear certain little noises inside the room, as if a person were busily engaged in folding and packing things away; but there was no word spoken; no conversation, and therefore the detective judged that whoever was in that room, was there alone.

He turned the knob of the door, cautiously, and pressed slowly but firmly upon the door.

It gave open before him, and peering through the crack thus made, he could see the back of a woman's figure, as she bent over an open trunk.

He pulled the door shut again, silently, and placing his lips close to the chief's ear, whispered:

"You take care of her, chief. It is the woman. I'll go on upstairs. Don't make any move till I have had time to get to the top and to look about me a bit. I don't want Jud to take the alarm too soon."

The chief nodded, and Nick went swiftly up the stairs, without making a sound, for it happened that they were thickly carpeted, and gave forth none.

The door into the front room on the second floor, was wide open, and as Nick went swiftly toward it, he saw the figure of a man rise out of a chair, and start toward it.

Nick waited, for he rightly guessed that Jud Catlin

was starting downstairs to the room where his sister was at work, packing.

The man stepped into the hall, and then Nick seized him—none too gently, either.

One hand grasped him by the throat, and the fingers pressed tightly against it, shutting off all sound of any cry that he might attempt to utter; and the other one dealt him a sharp blow in that region of the stomach which knocks the wind out of a man who receives it.

Catlin sank downward, in Nick Carter's grasp, with a choking, smothered groan, and as he did so, a second blow delivered on the point of his shapely chin, settled him. When he opened his eyes ten or fifteen minutes later, he was securely handcuffed—and very sick at his stomach. But that is getting ahead of the story.

Downstairs, in the back parlor of the house, the chief had stepped into the room, and was holding out a pair of handcuffs toward the woman who faced him with a smile of scorn on her coarsely handsome face.

"Better let me put 'em on quietly, Della," he said. "It will save a heap of trouble, if you do. You've got to go, you know. It doesn't do to abduct beautiful young women, in this twentieth century—and you've been monkeying with two of them."

"You'd never have found the first one, if that fool of a brother of mine hadn't tried it on with the other one," she returned.

"Maybe not. You'd better ask Nick Carter about that. He generally does what he sets out to do, I've noticed. Now that is better. You can sit down over there, in that chair and wait. You won't need your trunks right now, Della."

Upstairs, Nick had found both the girls, seated, fully dressed, in the rear room of the second floor, the door of which was locked when he tried to open it.

But he called out to them, to let them understand who was there, and then unlocked the door, as he had done with the one at the front of the house.

And that ends the story, except to explain a few necessary facts.

There had been an experience with a sweetheart, on the other side of the water that Leila had undergone, and that lover proved to be Paul Higham, son of the woman now wearing the handcuffs, and therefore nephew to Jud Catlin; and he had been no better than the rest of the breed—although Leila had never had any idea that he was bad, or weak, until after she had returned from abroad, when certain information had reached her, that compelled her to doubt him. She had written to him about it all, and he had promised to cross the ocean to her at once.

But he had delayed his coming, time after time, until she had begun to despair; and then she had received the letter that Adelina saw, which had stated, among other things, that he would be at Hite's store, that day, at the umbrella counter, at five o'clock.

But he did not go there. He had not crossed the ocean. He had sent his mother to America, in his place, and Judson Catlin had gone to the store to keep the appointment for him; so it happened about as that doctor whom Adelina had interviewed, said.

And the sight of Judson Catlin, whom she knew only as a relative of Higham's, had alarmed Leila into another attack of the aphasia, which had come upon her just at the moment when the young women behind the counter had seen her staring at Catlin; and he had cautiously moved away, partially understanding what had happened; he had told his sister about it, and she had gone into the store and led Leila away with her.

It was then that the plot was conceived.

It consisted merely in Catlin's keeping out of Leila's sight; of taking her back to England on the first steamer, and while she was still forgetting all about herself, and of marrying her to Paul Higham while she was in that condition; and of possessing themselves of her great fortune.

Nor had she recovered from the attack until Adelina was thrust into the room with her, that afternoon—and then, on the instant that she saw Adelina, memory had returned to her.

She admitted that she had been deeply in love with Paul Higham, and that she had still loved him—until she found that he had not come to meet her as he had promised, and then all her affection underwent a change; at least, she awoke to herself, despising him as thoroughly as she had loved him before.

The following morning, at the Touraine, Nick encountered Mr. Buckley, who seized upon him and exclaimed:

"Say, Carter, if you want that umbrella——"

"I don't," said Nick, laughing. "I have found the man, and that is better; but it was the purchase of the umbrella by Catlin, after all, that led to his undoing."

Another point worthy of comment is the fact that Nick and Adelina each arrived at the same goal, by totally different routes.

Nor did the detective forget to call upon Miss Gordon, while he was at the hotel, and to give her, not the rest of that twenty-five dollars he had promised her, but twenty-five more than he had already bestowed upon her.

Judson Catlin and his sister both went to prison on a conviction for abduction and assault with intent to do bodily harm; and the chief dug up one or two other counts against the handsome crook.

But Leila Lancaster was at her home again, happy and content, and well satisfied to have rid herself of such an incubus as Paul Higham.

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